

BIRDS
AND THEIR
NESTS AND EGGS



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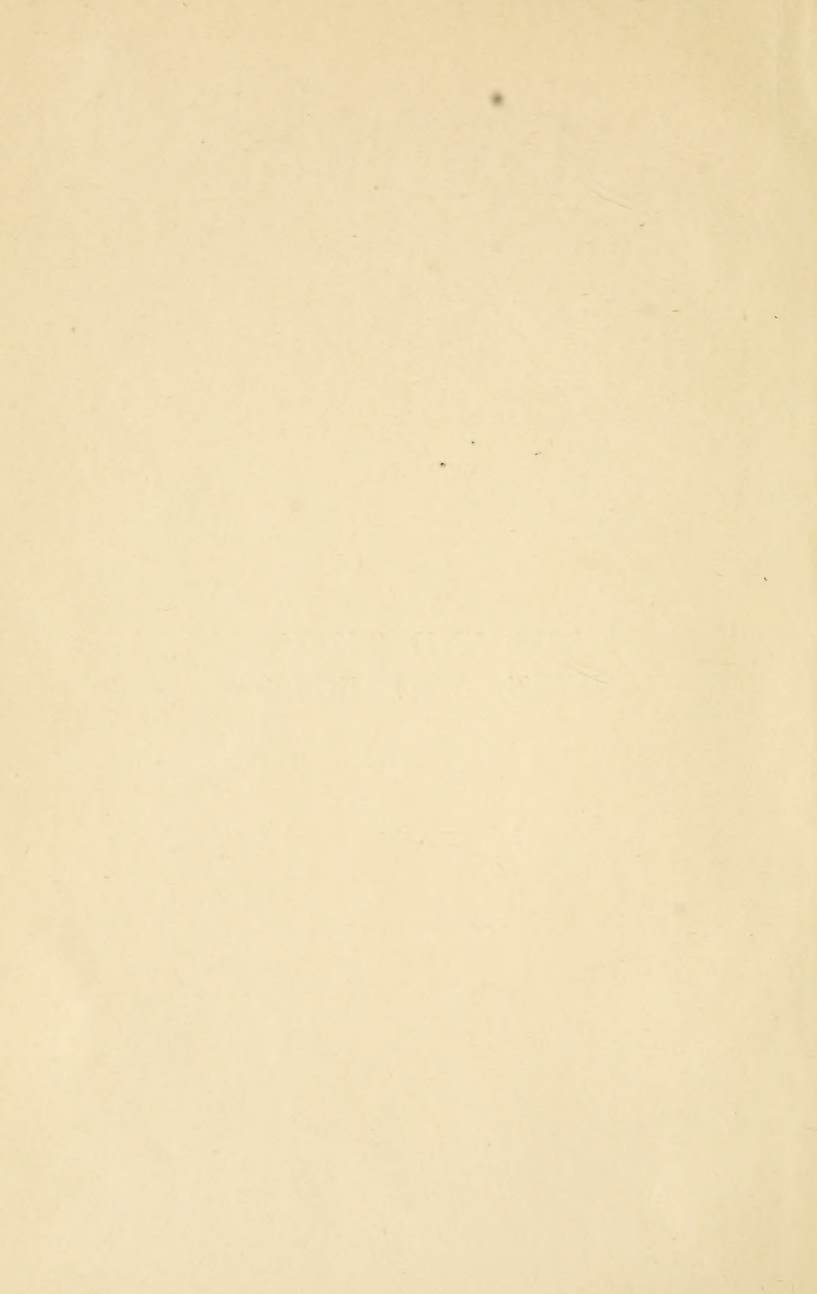
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BIRDS AND THEIR
NESTS AND EGGS





In Birdland.

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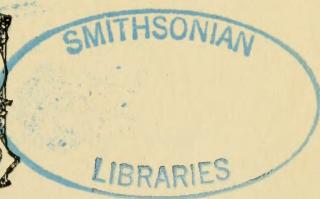
BIRDS AND THEIR NESTS AND EGGS

Found in and near great
towns

BY
GEORGE H. VOS, B.A., M.B.(Cantab.)

Illustrated by reproductions of photographs
of each bird, its nest and eggs, made by the
author from Nature, and of incidental scenes.

THREE SERIES IN ONE VOLUME.



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BY

JOHN G. COOPER, M.D.

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Preface

THIS book is an attempt to describe by camera and pen the recent rambles of two friends, during the months of May and June, in search of birds and their nests for the purpose of photographing them, "in and near London," that is, between a radius of six and sixteen miles from the heart of the city, and chiefly in the northern district. We have found these excursions most interesting, useful, and enjoyable, for, tap if ever so feebly the golden mine of Nature's store, and it will yield you back an immense wealth of true soul-uplifting happiness and joy.

All know that birds live and move and have their being in the fields and woods, but some of them, even the common ones, may have never been seen or perhaps heard by some of us, and we may know nothing about their most interesting habits and peculiarities. But the quest is open to all, and their busy lives of industry and care will teach us

many useful lessons, whilst the beauty of their forms and plumage must entrance us.

It is a matter of self-congratulation for us that so many of our charming feathered friends find a suitable home, and, in the case of the yearly *visitors* only to our shores, a convenient feeding and nesting ground so near to the vast, busy, noisy and smoke-begrimed metropolis, adding so much to the charms of a country walk.

The pleasant work of photographing birds from actual *life* can fall only to the specialist or leisured few, for, as is well known, the sitters must be artfully deceived and waited for, often hours at a time. But even when achieved, the results are in many cases disappointing, as difficulties not yet conquered by the photographic art, chiefly in connection with the rapidity of the plates, present themselves.

Live birds, too, when photographed in the wild state, and especially when on the nest, present little or no contrast from their surroundings (indeed this is one of Nature's safeguards for them), and therefore make poor pictures. Further, they almost always exhibit an unnatural alarmed look, because,

conceal yourself and camera as cleverly as you may, and wait like Patience on a Monument and still as a stone statue if you will, the birds, with their keen senses of hearing, sight and smell, detect the near presence of danger, even the click of the shutter causing them to start, though they are impelled to return to their duties of incubation and feeding their young by the paternal and maternal instincts that Nature has given them, and it is then that the photograph is taken. The movements of the birds, too, necessitate generally a quick exposure, often too short to render the details well. These difficulties, of course, disappear when you have a motionless subject, and can control your light and exposure at will.

The pictures of the *nests* in this work are, with a few exceptions, from actual specimens photographed where found and *in situ*. Those of the *birds* are photographs of characteristically stuffed typical individuals placed in natural surroundings, illustrating as nearly as possible the conditions under which they were observed. Some incidental scenes and botanical notes are also introduced to add interest to the text.

Various other descriptive notes also have been interpolated into the narrative. At the end of this volume a natural size photograph (in four plates) of the eggs of each bird mentioned is given, to show their relative size, and the various markings, the colours of each egg also being mentioned. Besides this there will be found a synopsis of each bird, combined with an alphabetical index, the most commonly applied Latin names and family being also included, with the derivations of their familiar English names, so that the work may be of some use for reference.

I would here add my thanks to my friend Mr. Alfred Hodgkinson for the great assistance he has rendered me in finding and naming many specimens of the nests, birds, and eggs.

The author consigns his photographic and literary attempts to the criticisms of a generous public, in the hope, if they accord him a favourable reception, of being able to extend this work, in the near future, so as to include all birds and their nests found "in and near London."

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

I WAS a photographer even when a boy. Wet plates were then in use, and I actually had a hand at making my own dry plates, as the years went on. Well do I remember the glad day when from the great London city there arrived a quarter-plate camera and portrait lens complete, the gift of my parents, when I had attained the age of twelve. And I blocked up a window in the dusty cellar of the old house, in which to sensitize my plates, develop, fix, and wash, carrying all my water up and down in cans and jugs, even monopolizing the family bath for washing prints. My knowledge of the gentle art was first culled from a small book, 'Instructions' it was called, that came packed in the box that held the apparatus

which I loved so well. And I stole hints, too, from a professional photographer, when I had the chance, and even got him to allow me once or twice to enter the dark room with him, when one of us had his portrait taken, or I myself had sat before the mystic lens, that stamped our features on the plate, which in the dim religious light came creeping out, after the mysterious chemicals had been poured on. I remember his stained fingers and black nails, inseparable from the wet plate process of those days. Nor can I forget my feelings when my own ten digits, stained to dark copper hue, would not respond to all my efforts with hot water, lemon, brush and soap. And how I trembled lest my new found pleasure should receive a sudden check, and camera and all be taken right away. I knew nothing in those days of modern lenses and the like, nor of snapshot cameras and shutters of the present type. I have got the old box still, constructed in two parts, that slide together in and out for the rough focussing,

and the antiquated lens with rack and pinion complete. And yet I love that old lens well, for many a good portrait did it take, and serves its purpose, too, even to-day. And those wet plate negatives ! Were they not grand ! But now, I buy my *dry* plates ready made. My lens is of the rectilinear type, my camera racks out, and is of bellows make, with rising front, swing back, and ball and socket head to fix upon the legs, the whole packing away with half a dozen double slides into a bag that can be carried with a strap upon the back, or if you bicycle, can be conveniently fixed on the machine. A shutter, too, takes snapshots if you like, when the light is good enough. I have found, however, for myself, that, though the apparatus may be of the best and most expensive kind, it is, as with the rifle, bat and billiard cue, ' the man behind ' that does the trick.

My friend Edward is a born naturalist, excelling in the art of finding birds' nests. How he spots them always puzzles me. I

must claim, however, that, begoggled as I am, I too can see the nests as well as he, *when he has shown me where they are*. By constant observation he can tell you at a



I: 'HOW HE SPOTS THEM ALWAYS PUZZLES ME.'

glance what bird that was that flitted past, or sits chirping unseen in yonder bush. And when he starts to find their *nests*, he is on them at once. 'There you are,' says he, 'with some nice eggs, and photograph-

able,' by which he means the nest can well be got at with the camera ; or if not, by fair means or by trick, with one leg of the camera tied to a convenient tree, another on a bush or fence, the third fixed somewhere else, I get a photograph somehow. And sometimes, if the nest be high, he'll climb the tree, and we, or rather he, will manage it that way.

And so, as the two things fitted well—his sharp eye and my experience in the photographic art—we made a compact. And many a trip we've had o'er moor and stream and copse, finding the nesting months but all too short for our congenial work.

CHAPTER II

OUR FIRST DAY'S OUTING: AMONGST THE ISLAND BIRDS. EARLY MAY.

The heart is hard in nature, and unfit
For human fellowship, being void
Of sympathy, and therefore dead alike
To love and friendship both, that is not pleased
With sight of animals enjoying life,
Nor feels their happiness augment their own.

COWPER.

WE have arranged to have a boat in readiness, and as we near the spot we find her at her moorings by the bank. A quiet place it is, that has not been disturbed for months, a veritable paradise for birds, a sanctum and retreat for them, though close by are the busy haunts of men. The warm May sun is glorious to-day, and there is a cloudless sky o'erhead. Choosing with some care a place well shaded by thick alders,

and from which the picture on the ground-glass screen is well composed, one second, and the thing is done! A duplicate ex-



II: 'THE PLACID WATERS SPREAD A THOUSAND THOUSAND MIRRORS AS IT SEEMS, TO RIGHT AND LEFT, AS FAR AS EYE CAN SEE.'

posure (a precaution that I always take if the subject be worth the while), and on we go.

We stand upon a grassy slope of pleasant

green, and all around a wealth of spring colour meets the eye, equalled perhaps, but not surpassed, by summer's glorious blaze. At our feet the yellow buttercups are bloom-



III: 'WILD MARGUERITES GALORE.' ($\frac{1}{10}$ size.)

ing, relieved by masses of the sea campion's white bells, growing quite tall here in their sheltered home. Streaks of red in places here and there are due to sorrel or to dock. And mingling with the whole grow grasses

tall and sleek, bending their waving heads in the soft breeze. And the lychens red and white are there, and wild marguerites galore. And giving life to all, the placid waters



IV: 'THE ISLAND WE WERE COMING TO.'

spread a thousand thousand mirrors as it seems, to right and left, as far as eye can see. Having lit our pipes to add completion to our joys, we settle to work. Past the

willows glides the boat, keeping near the sedges on the shore, my friend with his cold grey eye on them all the while, to spot a nest or watch a warbler where he goes, and so betrays his partner on her eggs. But besides some noisy sparrows from the town, which have come down just for a drink, we draw a blank in nests at all events. Ahead, above the island we are coming to, a pair of hawks are hovering—their prey young rats and birds, as we soon find. Some carrion crows are squawking their hoarse notes, and Ted thinks that they are nesting there. ‘And do you see those pigeons? This also is their home,’ says he.

But as we neared the bend, behold! a swan sailing around in conscious majesty, with wings all quivering and head bent back, quite ready to attack, and longing, if he could, to drive his horny beak into our anatomy somewhere, or break our arms with one swift stroke of his strong wings.¹ Now

¹ The deep metallic measured swish of a swan upon the wing betokens the great power that can lift and

for a snap-shot! But turn and swing the boat as best we might, I could not get the bird or yet the island right. And when I



V: THE ENTRANCE TO THE SWANS' HOME: 'THAT SPOT JUST WHERE THE SEDGES BREAK.'

did, the sun was wrong. Meantime, the swan had thought it best to swim away with quick and jerky strokes of his great

then propel the massive bird—a dead weight of some twenty pounds or more.

paddled feet (we found his wrath was raised because we were too near the spot that led up to his nest), and sought thus to decoy us from the scene. That spot just where the sedges break beneath the elder bush, now in full bloom—that was the entrance to their home.

From this we found there was a well tramped way—the 'Bridal Path' Ted aptly called it—through tangled bush, which led up to the summit of the isle. And there the pair had chosen with consummate skill a quiet spot within a glade wherein to build their nest. And many a time the birds had waddled up that path during the last few days, laden with sticks and soft green leaves, mostly of shining pondweed, which grows in quantities upon the bottom of the lake, and which they had diligently plucked out piece by piece and carried up to form the substance of their bed as well as to appease their appetities, for they are very fond of it.

But I anticipate. We found that this

island, which we always call 'Swan Island' now, was densely overgrown with various bushes, trees and tangled weeds. We chose a pebbly beach for landing, where there seemed a likely spot through which we could pursue our way; my companion led, and I followed with the camera, and legs, and bag, finding some difficulty in keeping the velvet cloth for focussing from being torn. Thick elders, privet and blackberries had to be gone through somehow bit by bit. And soon we separated, each diligently bent on finding the first nest. All at once Edward shouted, 'Here comes the old bird up the Bridal Path; look out!' And so we had to do, for he was *much* angered now. When we had landed he had done the same, unknown to us, beneath the elder bush, and was now rushing up the path, resenting our intrusion on his island home. We let him pass, and then we followed him, keeping a safe distance in the rear. Up, up, he went, his pathway leading in and out the brambles and the thorns. Ted led the way; I fol-

lowed perspiring, laden with the photographic kit. And soon I heard him say, 'Come on ; she's sitting on her nest.' And now, how truly charming was the scene

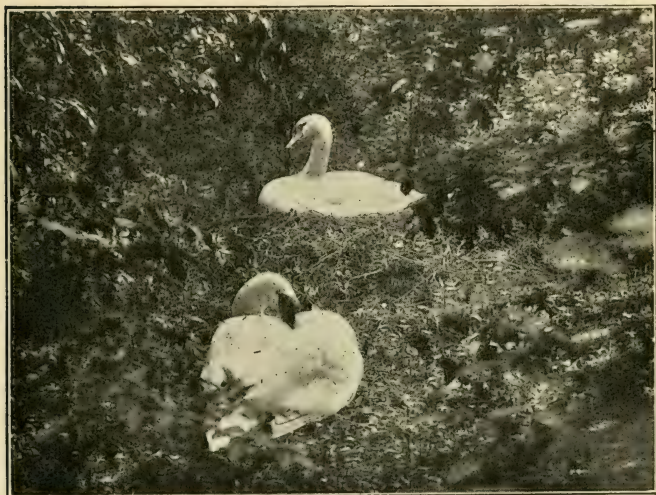


VI: 'AND OPENINGS HERE AND THERE REVEALED
THE QUIET RIPPLING WATERS DOWN BELOW.'

upon which our eyes fell : An opening in a lovely glade, o'ershaded by tall gorse and mays and sycamores ; the sun was glinting through the leaves, and openings here and

there revealed the quiet rippling waters down below.

Around us were some cooing doves. A



VII: 'THERE SHE SAT AMIDST IT ALL IN QUEENLY STATE, HER SNOW-WHITE MAJESTY' (MALE AND FEMALE SWANS).

blackbird sang continuously to his mate somewhere upon her eggs, to cheer her loneliness and make her pass the incubation time contentedly. A sedge warbler chir-

rupted out his little song meanwhile (the carrion crows had long since fled the scene). And there she sat amidst it all, in queenly state, Her snow-white Majesty, upon a large heaped mass of mud and sand and sticks, and still-wet weed, her throne about 18 inches high, 3 feet long, and wide in proportion. Some yellow gorse blooms almost brushed her head, and seemed to frame the picture that she made.

Slowly she turned her head from side to side, watching, now she was disturbed, but with the greatest dignity, for more intruders who might still be landing in the bush beneath. And posing in a lordly attitude, tired perhaps with his long climb, and with the faithful guard that he had kept below, the male bird took his place between us and his wife. 'What a find, and what a photo they will make!' said I. The sun was rightly placed, well to one side, throwing deep shadows on the grass, and so I hastened to fix up the camera at a convenient distance of some fifteen feet away. His lordly High-

ness took good care, as you can see, to keep himself between us and his charge. Nor would he allow us any latitude. For did we move a foot in his direction, out would



VIII: A SONG-THRUSH'S NEST ($\frac{1}{8}$ -size), 'WITH FOUR GREENISH-BLUE BLACK-SPOTTED EGGS.'

come his head from underneath his wing, prepared to rush at us. After a little wait, the camera all fixed and focussed up, the stop adjusted, and the plate sheath drawn,

he settled down, and took things quietly. But not for one second did that black eye shut. And my lady would persist in keeping up the swaying movement with her head. I gave them four exposures of four seconds each before I got one in which she was quite still. Well, this was good luck. To start so fortunately with the largest of the feathered tribe we sought, and under such propitious circumstances too ! 'How can we get her off her nest, to photograph the eggs ?' I asked. But this was done in due course, as shall be narrated further on. We felt quite satisfied with our work, but still we had another find, a thrush's nest, built in a bush, a few feet from the ground, with four greenish-blue black-spotted eggs. The mother bird betrayed her whereabouts, though cunningly enough, by slipping out into the undergrowth, and then running a few yards, not breaking cover till she reached the shore, when out she flew low down upon the water to the mainland bank. But we had noticed her.



IX : 'THIS FAMOUS SONGSTER OF OUR GARDENS, WOODS AND GLADES'. COMMON SONG-THRUSH, MALE, IN SUMMER PLUMAGE ($\frac{1}{3}$ -size).

The thrush builds a nest much like that of the blackbird, and the habits of the two

birds are similar. But why the thrush should line her nest with clay I do not understand. When the eggs are nearly hatched the female will sit quite tight, and allow you to inspect herself and nest, though only a few feet off. She knows full well that if the eggs get chilled just at this time the young ones, nearly born, will surely die.

This famous songster of our gardens, woods, and glades (Plate IX.) delights us mostly in the springtime, when the nest is building and the eggs are laid. Then, when the first streak of dawn is seen, he will often annoyingly awake you with his song. But you will forgive him when you are *quite* awake ! And late into the evening, when the sun has sunk quite out of sight, he is there again singing his sweetest, perched upon his favourite twig, generally one that is dead and without leaves, as I have often seen him in my old plum tree. The notes of the thrush always appear to me to be, as it were, a long-continued questioning appeal. One bird in

my garden seemed always to say, 'Dorothy dear, Dorothy dear, Dorothy dear' (my daughter's name) 'why don't you come? why don't you come?' apparently calling her with a startling distinctness of speech. And this contrasts with the song of the blackbird, which to me sounds like a well drawn out argument or plaint, because of some long nursed injury or wrong. The words it seems to say are: 'I told you so,' 'I knew it was,' 'Didn't I say so now?' 'There, you see it is,' 'You don't think I was wrong?' 'I'm sure I'm right,' 'You know I am,' and so on, until, if you approach too close, or something puts him off, he flits to another garden or a far off bush or tree, only to begin again.

* * * *

Then we paddled to the shore, and tying up the boat in its accustomed place, we ambled homewards quite contentedly, and passed into the madding crowd again, with pleasant recollections of the scene we had just left.

That night I developed all the plates. You know as well as I, how far we had succeeded in our first day's jaunt.

CHAPTER III

DOWN NIGHTINGALE VALLEY : EARLY MAY.

THE man born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and nursed from early infancy in the lap of luxury, without a care or thought as to the 'needful' for his daily bread, *unless he can rise well above himself and the circumstances in which so-called 'Chance' has placed him*, can have little or no idea of the unadulterated pleasure that the simple-minded man can get in a quiet and natural way, from a walk into the country during a few hours of relief from the daily duties of his life. And this pleasure is all the greater if he focusses his mind upon some special object, as the finding of a particular kind of bird or nest. The fresh, pure, smokeless air, the glorious sunshine, the quiet from the

turmoil of the trains, the trams, the bicycles, and the motor-cars, the sense of freedom, for a time at least, from all his cares and work, combined with the change of clothing from the city suit to rough and tumble clothes, are joys that gold cannot buy.

Such were the feelings that animated my companion and me as we started on our walk to find and photograph a nest of the sweet songsters that inhabit Nightingale Valley: an hour or so of country road, and then the quiet lane, sloping gently downwards till it meets the level of the little brook which it spans.

It had a shady side, and this we followed by the hedge beneath the trees, until we reached a gap, a sudden opening guarded by a rustic stile. Beyond lay the valley. Already we had caught the sounds we knew so well. Nightingales are sociable, and love to live in happy groups, but brook no trespass on each other's rights when nesting operations begin. So Nightingale Valley is a happy spot. Each spring, as April ripens out the

leaf-buds on the trees, the birds come back



X: 'THE QUIET LANE.'

to scenes of last year's joys, and there await
their future mates, who follow them on

hopeful wing. Over sea and land, through fog and rain and wind, by river, field and flood, the little immigrants have flown, finding at last the very hedge, the bush, the twig whereon their troth was plighted the year past.

And thus met and agreed, they start to build their nest. 'Is it inside a bush or on the ground that we shall build our nest this year, sweet mate?' is a question about which they cogitate with many hops and twitters, but soon make up their minds. *She* finds the first twig, and sidles with it up to her mate. They both agree that it fits well. It's *his* turn now, and hers again, and so the sticks are fetched up one by one, as well as small roots and hairs. The pair meanwhile are busy with their beaks and claws, and deftly weave the structure to a neat round shape, hollowed within, and smooth inside with soft old leaves—those of the oak first favourites. A week or two of busy work, and all is ready for the eggs. Their labour is relieved by night when moon-

light fills the groves, as well as in the day when everything is bright, by soft, sweet songs of happy melody which speak contentedness and health. It is mainly from ignorance of the note of the nightingale, and from the fact that the singing season is so short and early in the year, when people do not get out much, that the bird is generally thought to sing only in the night. I have sometimes, when at Cambridge, played cricket all the afternoon to the accompaniment of the song of several nightingales in the trees close by. A like delusion exists as to the plant the evening primrose (and similar species), thought to open only in the evening, but which in reality opens only to its full, like other plants, in bright sunshine. The facts of the case are that the nightingale is a bird, and one of the few of our British birds, that sings at night as well as in the day,¹ and the buds of the evening primrose open as they mature, even when the sun is low,

¹ The thrush and the sedge warbler have been heard to sing at night in the nesting season.

which perhaps no other indigenous plant in England does.

In due time the eggs are laid. One by one they come until the usual five are there, the colour a brownish olive green. Now follow long days and nights of quiet rest. The male bird sings his song, with its burden, 'Peace at home,' to his contented mate. But the notes are those of rivalry as well, daring all other nightingales; for they are brave and jealous birds withal.

We knew their ways, that singing ceases when the young are hatched (they have no time then to indulge in song!), and as the valley here and there resounded with their thrills, we thought we should soon find the object of our search. It was not so easy as we had thought, for the nests were well concealed; but patience and close search rewarded us. Low down, close to the ground, a bird flew out, and there we found her home, a cosy nest with three warm eggs.

These birds build either in a bush or small

tree a few feet from the ground, or inside a hedge, and sometimes, as in our case, close to the ground. It was a simple matter to adjust the focus and expose the plates, and



XI: 'A COSY (NIGHTINGALE'S) NEST WITH THREE WARM EGGS' ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size).

we were well contented with our find. We feasted our ears long after this on many a song, trying to catch the variations in the sweet orchestra, by this performer or by

that. The nightingale loves to sing in quiet, leafy boweries of green.



XII: 'WE COULD SEE THEM AS THEY SANG JUST OVERHEAD.' THE MALE NIGHTINGALE ($\frac{2}{3}$ -size).

We crept up stealthily to the place from

which the notes came, remaining still as mice when we got near. Often the birds allowed us to approach so close that we could see them as they sang just overhead, absorbed in rhapsody for many minutes at a time, piping out their lullabies. The plumage of the nightingale is very plain : brown and grey are the only colours that the birds display ; the back is brown, the breast a brownish grey. They leave this country with their young in July or the next month without fail.

As we sat and watched the nightingales, we became aware that they were not the only occupants of this secluded dell, for more than once we had heard the triple, and sometimes four times, loud, and oft-repeated notes (see page 147) of that peculiar bird the wryneck, so called from the wriggles which it gives its neck when in an excited state. It is also called the cuckoo's mate, for it arrives just at the time of, or shortly previous to, the advent of that bird upon our shores. When in the early spring we can say with Solomon of old, ' The winter is past



XIII: 'THAT PECULIAR BIRD THE WRYNECK, ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE BARK ON WHICH IT CREEPS.' MALE ($\frac{1}{2}$ -size).

—the time of the singing of birds has come,' then shall we hear the wryneck's note, as he busily ascends a tree trunk or creeps along a

bough in search of insect food, darting out his shining tongue, snake-like, into every chink and cranny that he finds. He will generally be alone, but sometimes with a mate. One came along and showed himself to us, and did not seem to take much notice of our presence ; they are not shy as a rule. Their plumage in colour and markings resembles that of the woodcock, and is very like the bark of a dark coloured tree ; in climbing he holds himself close to the bough in his short jerky creeps. The bird, therefore, is more often heard than seen. He does not use his tail, however, as a *point d'appui* like the woodpecker or the creeper. Building, as the wryneck does, in holes in decayed trees, we despaired of getting a photo of the nest. The eggs, like those of most birds that build in dark places, are pure white. The bird makes a hissing noise when taken in the hand, which, added to its general snake-like movements, markings and tongue, are very remarkable characteristics.

Here, too, were several 'blue tits,' or, as

they are more often called, 'tomtits,' enjoying the quiet of these solitudes, though they may often be seen even in town gardens, close to the house and traffic of the road.



XIV: 'ACROBAT, GYMNAST, TIGHTROPE-WALKER, TRAPEZIST.' THE BLUE TIT, MALE ($\frac{3}{4}$ -size).

They will always come where there are old trees to be found, in which there is plenty of harbour for insects. Acrobat, gymnast, tightrope-walker, trapezist, do not by any means exhaust the names we might apply to

this active and pretty little bird.¹ Backwards, outwards, downwards, forwards, inwards, upwards, turns and skips this pretty blue and yellow bird in his search for food. He is most useful in getting rid of garden pests, and stays with us the whole year round. The tit (which is almost the smallest of our British birds) is best seen in the winter when the trees are bare ; but his little 'tweet, tweet' will always tell you where he is. It is sorrowful to contemplate that this little bird, though so charming in his habits and so attractive in his garb, should be of a quarrelsome and vindictive nature. But so it is. Let us, however, be generous, and attribute the combative manners of this little featherweight fighter to the instinct of self-preservation rather than to self-conceit. For though he did his best with beak and claw, it would be but so many pin pricks to the human hand that sought his hurt.

¹ Test his acrobatics by suspending a morsel of fat to a fairly thick piece of string : he will not be long in climbing down to the string to get at the food.

And yet these little birds will sit tight upon their eggs, sometimes even flying at the intruding mortal who dares to molest them at the nest.

Waiting quietly as we did in Nightingale Valley, another little bird, the creeper, also favoured us with a view of himself. We first became aware of his presence by the little 'twee, twee' that he kept on uttering. Flying from a tree, the stem and boughs of which he had completely searched for food, we saw him, selecting another for the same purpose, go to the bottom of it with an undulating flight, and then rapidly ascend in little jerky creeps (a favourite way with him), using his tail as a support, like the woodpecker. He quickly saw us, however, and immediately hid himself, and his 'twee, twee' was soon far away. He is rather an odd looking little bird with a curved beak most suitable for inserting into all the holes and openings that he finds, and he is full of restless activity in searching for his insect food. I have frequently seen him in gardens

in the spring, but because of his love of concealment of his little self, when you hear his



XV: THE CREEPER, MALE ($\frac{2}{3}$ -size)

note you must wait patiently and still for a glimpse of him. His plumage too (like the

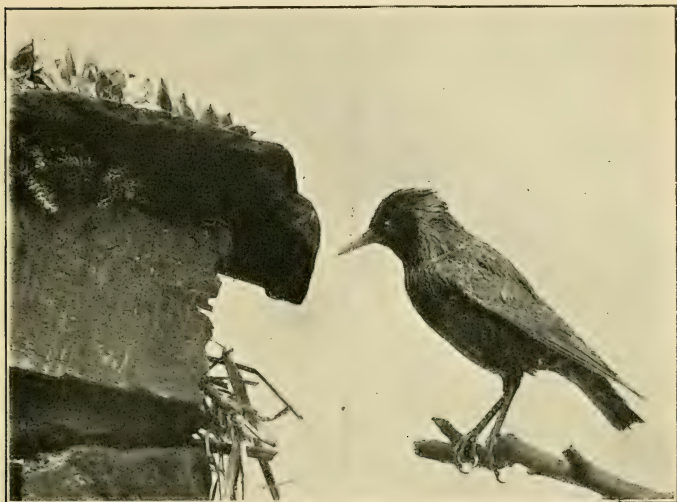
wryneck's) is much like the dark bark of trees, and he keeps close to the wood on which he creeps. The nest being always in a crack or hole, we did not expect to find one that would be photographable, but perhaps we shall some day. It is well made—generally in April—four to eight white reddish-brown spotted eggs being laid.

We had seen many starlings on our way down here, and they are almost everywhere. We are all familiar with the bird, but few have seen the nest. We found one in an old tree stump, but it was too high to photograph. It contained three delicately tinted pale greenish-blue eggs, without markings or spots of any kind (five are generally laid), and we had to reach down far to get at them. The structure is not a true nest at all. Any one could imitate it. Select a hole somewhere, high up or near the ground, under the eaves of a roof, a crevice in a wall, in fact anywhere you like, carelessly arrange in it, in a circular manner, a collection of hay, straw, and pieces of stick, a few roots and

hairs, and some feathers too, taking care to leave some bits sticking out, and there you have the nest. Perhaps, if you have not *seen* the nest, you are well acquainted with it in another way, and have done anything but bless the builder of it when you have had the plumber's bill for 'two hours' work upon the roof,' the details thus: 'To unstopping gutter, cleaning out same, re-arranging six slates, nails, materials, and time.' The bird, though mischievous perhaps, is handsome in his green-black coat, which has a fine blue sheen upon it, especially in bright sunshine. He is a well got up and groomed gentleman at all times of the year (Plate XVI). His somewhat sombre appearance is relieved by many grey-brown spots and bars of the same colour down the outside of the quills. The male and female are nearly alike. Often as a boy in Guernsey I have seen immense flocks of starlings in the winter, driven south on the approach of cold, though many remain in England all the year. Many times have I watched them (as others must

have done) feeding near the cows and sheep, often alighting unmolested on their backs, to rid them of their ticks. The birds use their sharp pointed beaks with good effect in seeking out all sorts of pests, whether on animals, the grass, the earth or trees, and are therefore of great use to the agriculturist. So pray forgive this depredator when he steals your ripe cherries and your mulberries, which, by the way, he enjoys quite as much as you. I had frequent opportunities, during a long illness in my bed, of listening to their musical attempts outside the window of my room, perched now upon a favourite bough, and then upon the gutter or the chimney top. And attempts they are, 'scooping' up and down the gamut, as a music teacher once said to me, for only now and then do they succeed in bringing out clear notes, though they will 'sing' for hours at a time, and as if burdened with an excess of happiness and joy. The bird is capable of strong and rapid flight, but I think the easy way in which he glides or sails along is worthy of

note. For the wing is not of great expanse, and ends, too, in a point. But watch him reach a house top or a tree : he does so with the greatest ease, and scarcely a flutter of



XVI: 'HE IS A WELL GOT UP AND GROOMED GENTLEMAN AT ALL TIMES OF THE YEAR.' STARLING GOING TO NEST ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size).

the wing. To see the starling feed upon your lawn, in meadows or elsewhere (don't go too close, or he will fly away), and watch his busy methods, his quick, eager struts and

rapid runs, together with his untiring activity during nesting time in taking food up to his young, you would certainly say that he was a real disciple of the 'strenuous life.' But yet he never seems to tire, and always is happiness itself, whether at work or play. The starling is a very hardy bird. He has a thick skin and shot-resisting feathers. His flesh, however, is tough and bitter, and his food not of the cleanest kind. On these accounts he is seldom killed to be eaten, being more lucky in this respect than his neighbours, the sparrow, blackbird and thrush.

So ended our pleasant, and I think successful, visit to Nightingale Valley.

CHAPTER IV

WITH THE ISLAND BIRDS ONCE MORE :
MIDDLE OF MAY

TO-DAY is a bright May day, notwithstanding that some threatening clouds look ominous away there in the south. No such considerations, however, daunt the ardent naturalist. It does not take us long to slip down to the waterside again, bent on exploring more islands and on finding what other birds have therein made their nests. The boat is at her wonted moorings, so, armed as before with camera and slides, the islands soon are reached. Beautiful they are, reposing in a peaceful calm, the cool clear water rippling into wavelets where the wooded armlets do not stretch out far.

In the shallows, rooted to the bottom where the banks shelve gently down, are

fine clumps of water chickweed, emerald green and dainty to the eye, shaded here and there by the free growing floating pondweed, with its pointed leaves. The plants will



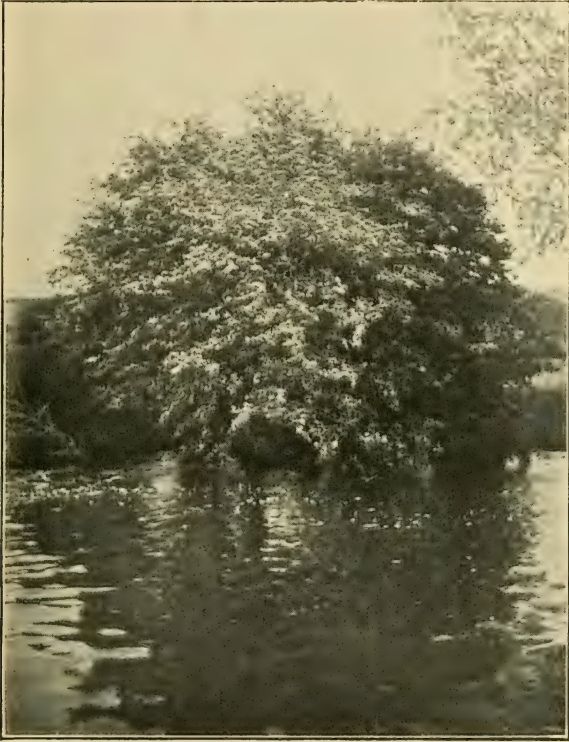
XVII: 'THE COOL CLEAR WATER RIPPLING INTO
WAVELETS WHERE THE WOODED ARMLETS DO NOT
STRETCH OUT FAR.'

soon be gay with numberless long-lasting red spikes of bloom. And flourishing more shyly, the large round leaves of the brandy bottle float; they much resemble those the water-

lily bears, but the protruding golden cups in July can admit of no mistake. These flowers—when first out and freshly picked—have a distinct odour of fine Cognac. More rarely still, a few plants of the frogbit thrive, with its small oval leaves (*see* Kingfisher, Plate XXXIII), that, starting in the early spring as pear-shaped buds, which dropped off from the parent plant, lie dormant in the mud, and so quite safe from frost, till warmer days come round, and then expanding into leafy growth, are buoyed up by generating oxygen, and rise to float their one year's life and reproduce their buds in turn. (This interesting mode of reproduction can well be watched in a good sized aquarium.) The brandy bottle's painted leaves are lifted now and then by extra puffs of wind, looking as if some life were there, of fish or bird. And as we near the shore, dark green masses of the wild mint growing on the edge betray their presence by the hot and pungent odours that the sun draws out. Some rough-jagged light green leaves of gipsy wort, all

but growing in the stream, strike the eye—companions to the tall and handsome purple loosestrife stems amongst the sand and stones, that by and by will add vivid colour to the scene. White and scarlet catchflies are flourishing in fine style, stealing a march upon the yarrows, pink and grey. The bloom is still upon the may, whilst privet bushes show a wealth of bud. And prickly blackberries are promising great things for tarts and jam this year. This island, like the others, is covered with dense undergrowth, from which the oak grows out, with its young and tender tassels dancing in the breeze, and many so-called ‘oak apples’ (insect-made) hanging from the stems. Alders and poplars have a place amongst the greenery, making a contrasting background and a shelter for their shorter friends. Now and then a catkin is shed from a bowing willow branch, and the stream floats the tiny seeds along to find a new home for themselves. Peering from the boat down into the stilly depths, and choosing a calm

spot that is not ruffled by the wind, or where the sociable and busy whirligig beetles are



XVIII: 'THE BLOOM IS STILL UPON THE MAY.'

dancing their wild jigs in ceaseless circles round
and water spiders skate the livelong sunny

day, a soft green carpet meets the eye. The water thyme, now a serious hindrance to navigation, introduced into this country from far Canadian shores, holds its own down there,



XIX: 'THE SOCIABLE AND BUSY WHIRLIGIG BEETLES ARE DANCING THEIR WILD JIGS IN CEASELESS CIRCLES ROUND.' ($\frac{1}{8}$ -size.)

and forms a comfortable bed, that harbours perch and roach and dace. But near by, hidden by thick stalks of weed, with quivering fins, and ever watchful eye, lurk greedy

pike, both great and small. As the eye gets accustomed to the light, a busy scene of smaller life presents itself upon the water bed: the lively water-boatman plies his tiny pair of oars, and water-beetles of all sizes, each with a little bead of air upon his back that gives him life, are hurrying to and fro, popping from time to time up to the water's brim to renew their bead of oxygen when it gets small. And fishspawn-loving caddisworms are crawling slowly by, carrying along their little houses of queer build, adorned with sticks and dead snail shells. Soon they will take their flight on gaudy wing, wondrously metamorphosed into pretty shapes: May-flies we shall call them then. Countless other insects are also there, scurrying to and fro, seeking their daily bread.

Such was the spot we started to explore. Ted did not need to say it was a likely place for nests. So, tearing our way through thick and thin, we entered on our quest.

Whirr, whirr, whirr, whirr, and with an angry quack out flew a frightened duck.

Searching through a matted mass of dry dead wood, from out of which the bird had flown, eleven greenish-white eggs stood out quite plainly in the gloom, lying warm and snug in a large deep nest of twigs and sticks and grass, comfortably lined with a quantity of feathery down, torn from the mother builder's breast.

By this time those dark clouds in the south had forged their way overhead, and thunder grumblings now and then gave presage of a coming storm. 'Do you think you can get the nest, with so bad a light?' 'I'll try, at any rate, for such a chance must not be thrown away.' So, despite the now pattering rain, I set the camera up. But, owing to the uneven ground and the denseness of the dead wood round the nest (some of which we broke away), it took some time to get the legs in place. So dark, too, was the sky above, it was no easy task to get the focus right. But at last it was arranged, and with the lens stopped to F/32, I gave exposures of

two and a half minutes, to make quite sure of *some* result, at all events.

This performance done, I felt much like the proverbial duck, caught in a thunder-



XX: 'COMFORTABLY LINED WITH A QUANTITY OF FEATHERY DOWN, TORN FROM THE MOTHER BUILDER'S BREAST.' A WILD DUCK'S NEST (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -size).

storm! The old bird had dashed away with angry flaps of wing upon the water, to show how vexed she was. She put in a far-off appearance now and then. A few days after

this we had the satisfaction of seeing her piloting her little brood of ten, with nervous restlessness, in and out of the reeds close by. And one was missing from the clutch! Was it unhatched, or a prey to rats or pike? By July these birds could fly. At this age the young birds are known as 'flappers', and in the following month, if still remaining there, they may fall to sportsmen with their guns and dogs. The old birds will perhaps revisit the same spot next year, and try another hatch. And if not shot or killed, the young ones, too, might come back to the place where first they saw the day.

When Ted and I now talk of Wild Duck Island, we know the spot we mean.

But the island was to yield more discoveries this same day. We had almost made the round of it when, coming to an elder bush, out dropped, one by one, in pell-mell haste, some ten feet from the ground, a string of small black wriggling balls, which at first looked like small rats; but soon we found that they were little

moorhens just hatched out. Ten feet from the ground is high up for a moorhen's nest ; but doubtless the old birds feared the vermin that was there, and, though not furnished with gripping claws like other birds, to sit on branches or tree tops, they still had seen the danger and prepared for it, well knowing that as soon as their young brood were hatched they, taking to the water, could by swimming get away. But what instinct caused these fledglings, that no one yet had seen, to escape as we came up ? How had they—only a few hours old—learnt that our approach meant danger to themselves ? We picked up tenderly five little fluffy things, for they could scarcely crawl, and then we let them go. A few days after this, on revisiting the nest, we found that their precipitation had cost them dear. For there, stiff and stark upon the twigs, hung two young forms.

After the storm had cleared away our further search was again rewarded. A black-headed bunting had built a neat round nest



XXI: NEST OF A BLACK-HEADED BUNTING 'AMONGST
A PATCH OF BRAMBLES, GRASS AND LEAVES.'
($\frac{1}{6}$ -size).

inside a patch of bramble, grass and leaves,
almost upon the ground.

Many a time when walking by a stream I have seen this bird (to all intents a sparrow, were it not for its black head and mode of flight ¹) louping along from place to place as I have advanced, now on a reed, now on a blade of sedge, bending it nearly double by its weight, and the next moment on a may bush or blackthorn, and so on until at a bend in the stream, or a divergence of the path, my little friend and I have parted company.

The nest on this occasion contained three purplish white eggs, streaked and spotted with dark brown; it was built of thin grasses, rushes and dried bits of hay, and lined with fine fibrous stalks and hair. We found this nest also by seeing the occupant fly out. The male bird kept flitting round on a privet bush close by, his mate not far away, quite silent, but in sad dismay.

Then we saw a large white bird, quite a stranger in these parts. It might have been

¹ The black-headed bunting is often called the reed sparrow.



XXII: 'THE MALE BIRD UPON A PRIVET BUSH CLOSE BY—QUITE SILENT BUT IN SAD DISMAY.' BLACK-HEADED BUNTING¹, MALE, IN SUMMER PLUMAGE ($\frac{1}{2}$ -size).

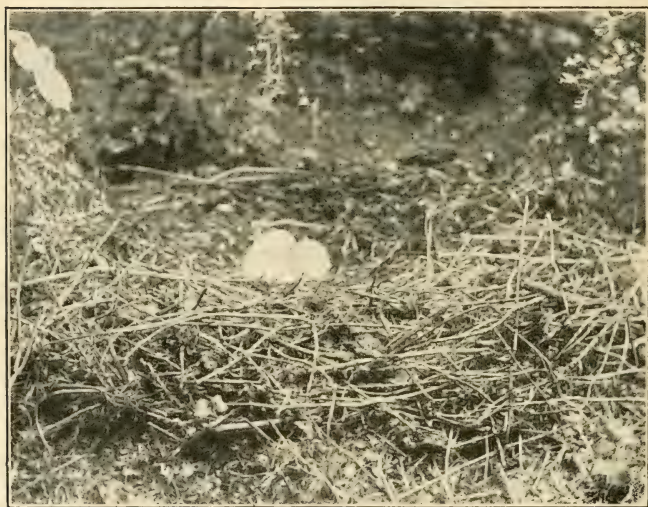
a seagull at first sight, but the mode of flight, the crescent wing, and the weird,

¹ This bird is better known as the Red Bunting.

melancholy cry, told us at once it was the large sea swallow, known also as the greater tern. We thought it was the male watching and wheeling near its nest or young close by ; but these we failed to find. The birds lay early in the year, and we were somewhat late ; the nest, moreover, is a mere hollow in the sand, and the young would have been hatched by this time, and either flown or in good hiding with the mother somewhere there. ' Perhaps next season the pair may come again, and may we have better luck next time,' said Ted. I echoed these sage words, especially as I had learned that a pair of lesser grebes had been seen there, and probably had nested too. We had also noticed sanderlings skipping and taking their short flights amongst the stones that lay upon the sand, and these birds, too, are not behind in their lovemaking when St. Valentine's day comes round.

We left this quiet scene, and paddled leisurely to our isle of pleasant memory, that we had visited a few days past, to see

how the old swans had fared. Climbing up the 'Bridal Path,' we found the birds had gone. The nest was there, but, to our joy, three great green eggs were left unhatched.



XXIII: A SWAN'S NEST WITH THREE GREAT GREEN EGGS ($1\frac{1}{2}$ -size).

These we washed with the greatest care, and, replacing them, I exposed two plates. And this is how we got the old bird off her nest (*see* Chap. II). (Swans lay from

five to six eggs at a time, but often they are not all hatched, and sometimes they are simply dropped upon the grass.)

Another walk round this island brought us yet more luck. Getting down amongst some flowering grasses on the shore—near where a constant warble told us we were trespassers—and after a laborious search amongst the reeds, there, hanging, we saw a sedge warbler's nest, some two feet from the water. Then, with one leg of the camera standing well out into the stream, the others fixed as best I could, I got a pretty picture, which I value much. It was a lovely deep nest, containing four brown speckled eggs. It measured about two inches across inside, and was of the same depth. It was built round four reeds, and was largely made up of fine fibres that looked like hairs, woven and interwoven till the structure was quite firm. One stem was even bent to suit the builders' requirements and taste. How did the clever birds begin to fix the first foundation of their home on those four stems?



XXIV: 'THERE HANGING, WE SAW A SEDGE WARBLER'S NEST, SOME TWO FEET FROM THE WATER' ($\frac{1}{2}$ -size).

And could we, with our vaunted skill, construct the like? The reeds were soft as yet,

but strong, and, when looked through, showed a greenish-yellow light, which told me that the plates would need a lengthier exposure than was usually required. Since the stems were still quite young, it followed that the nest would rise as they grew higher, and so be safe from floods and rats, and yet not be so high as to catch the wind (for the structure of the nest was very frail) or be seen by hawks and suchlike pillagers. The hen had glided from the nest into some bushes near—a sleek brown object slipping quietly away. And thus we found her nest. She did not need to tell her consort she had left the eggs. For he, though hidden in the oak above, renewed his warbles with a troubled strain, and kept them up unceasingly, making one wish that he could be tamed and take a place amongst caged birds. Whilst I was focussing (hidden as I almost was amongst the reeds) I saw the hen bird peering with an anxious look into her nest, but only just to see that the eggs were there. For when I made a movement



XXV: 'I SAW THE HEN BIRD PEERING WITH ANXIOUS
LOOK INTO HER NEST.' SEDGE WARBLER, FEMALE
($\frac{2}{3}$ -size).

to uncap the lens (in the vain hope that the
shy bird would give me a sitting, even if the

plate were not exposed enough), it was too much for her courage, and away she went. But after all was done, and immediately we left, she slipped back upon her eggs, to take up once again her patient task. And now her consort warbled out his satisfaction in a new and joyful tone of glee, gurgling out his little notes even more quickly than before. Happy little visitors to our sea-girt isle. Will you find out your way again, o'er river, field and tree, and build once more amongst these reeds ?

Another good day's work was this, affording most pleasant recollections as we smoked the pipe of peace at home and developed at our leisure the plates I had exposed. The sedge warbler may be found along streams or waters where there is abundant wild growth on the banks. Sit down on a river bank upon a summer's day quietly for half an hour, light your pipe, and wait and watch quite silently. When quiet is completely restored and you are intent upon the scene, you will doubtless hear the 'plop' of a

water rat into the river, as he leaves his hole for a short excursion in the stream, and you will probably catch sight of him as well. A moorhen may slip slyly round amongst the reeds, knowing all the time that you are there (he, and the rat too, can smell your pipe). The surface of the water may be broken by the skimming of a swallow or a swift, the blob of a roach or dace, or the bubbles of a bleak, as they take the fly. Or perhaps a trout is on the feed, or a jack may make a sudden rush upon the roach. These you will not fail to notice if they are there. Dragon flies, great and small and variously hued, may flit around you all the time, together with a butterfly or two. An old frog will give you a short swimming lesson, and then lay up under some flotsam and jetsam in the stream, and croak a soft slow croak, and it will puzzle you to find where he has gone, unless he makes a movement to improve his position and his shifty hold. A harmless old cow may make you jump with a sudden snort just at your back.

A flight of lazy lapwings may cross you high overhead. You may be fortunate enough to see the now comparatively rare kingfisher take a rapid flight down stream. But you will be almost certain to see the little sedge warbler popping in and out among the reeds and grasses almost at your very feet, never in one place for a moment, and exhibiting movements of the greatest agility and grace.

CHAPTER V

ON THE MOORLANDS IN THE MONTH OF JUNE

OH ! the glories of a fine June day ! Such a day we had before us wherein to pursue our quest. Ted told me he had found a wren's nest, so off we went to take a photograph of it. Leaving the smoky train, we soon trod the cool green grass, intending to follow a winding stream that led to uplands a few miles ahead. The pretty whitewashed Lock House on the river bank tempted us to rest awhile. On the common, not far off, reposed a flock of geese, unheeding the approach of Michaelmas and apple sauce. But why were they alarmed so suddenly ? Was it that they had caught the fatal words from our lips as we discoursed of them ? And then a biscuit thrown amongst a group of their first



XXVI: 'THE PRETTY WHITEWASHED LOCK HOUSE ON
THE RIVER BANK.'



XXVII: 'A FLOCK OF GEESE, UNHEEDING THE
APPROACH OF MICHAELMAS AND APPLE SAUCE.'

cousins, the farm hens, produced a lively scramble for the coveted tit-bit.

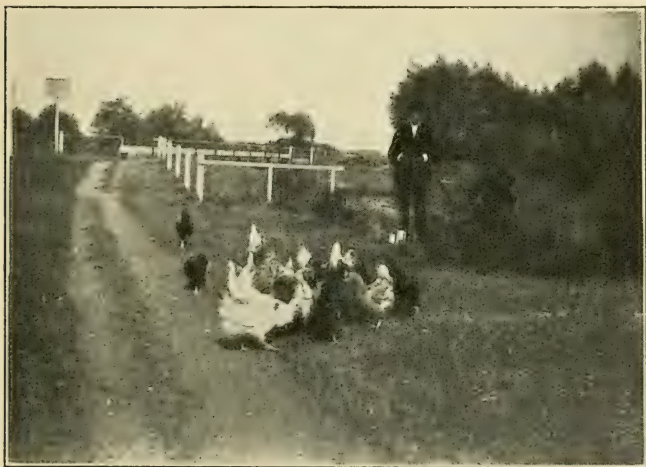
Last night a thunderstorm had waked most sleepers in the great metropolis ; but



XXVIII: 'WHY WERE THEY ALARMED SO SUDDENLY ?'

now no traces of the rain were left, for the bright sun had changed it all. Lowlands always have a special charm, I think. Rugged cloud-capped mountain tops and raging streams, broken here and there by roaring

cataracts and rushing torrents are magnificent ; but give me the quiet solace of our English meadow-lands, with all that they reveal to those who seek the nature-secrets



XXIX: 'A LIVELY SCRAMBLE FOR THE COVETED
TIT-BIT.'

which they hold. To-day the cattle—black and streaked and brown—are standing or resting peacefully beside the ripening hay, tired maybe from feasting plentifully upon the soft green sward, and waiting till the sun

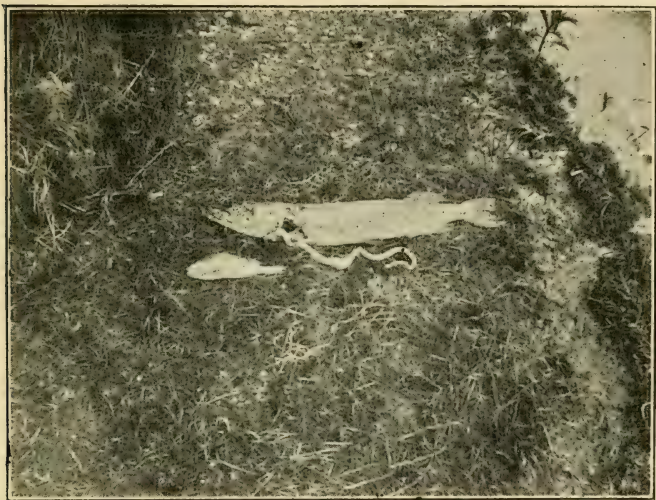
is low before they browse their evening meal. And the clear sweet water in the pool is there to slake their thirst. Some swallows flit



XXX: 'TO-DAY THE CATTLE ARE STANDING OR RESTING PEACEFULLY—AND THE CLEAR SWEET WATER IN THE POOL IS THERE TO SLAKE THEIR THIRST.'

across the meandering brook, or mount high up into the air with easy grace, as suits their fancy free ; others are busy with sweet morsels for their young, secure in cosy nests

beneath the eaves of the old barn upon the hill. And look there!—in his lonely solitude the long-legged heron stands. It needs good eyesight to perceive the bird, so still and



XXXI: SIGNS OF THE HERON'S REVELRY. 'DIS-EMBOWELLED, AND THE EYES GOUGED OUT.' A DEAD JACK (PIKE) AND PERCH ($\frac{1}{10}$ -size).

motionless is he, unless you get quite close, when, with a laboured hop, he starts upon the wing, and with out-hanging legs, is soon almost lost to view; then he finds another

spot where he can be alone and watch. The heron loves his solitude, and knows also that it is only thus that he can hope to seize a darting fish, or snap a wriggling eel. Here are signs of his night's revelry; for it is in the moon's pale light that he can best pursue his prey. We had noticed from time to time upon the river bank several dead perch, and had wondered how and why they could have met their death: at last we came upon a jack of three pounds weight, lying, quite fresh, but dead, with another perch beside him. This surely was the biter bit! All the victims had been treated just alike—disembowelled and the eyes gouged out. At once we thought we saw the cause. That long sharp beak and those powerfully gripping claws had done the work.¹ Strange these seeming incongruities! Does not the otter take his

¹ We have since thought that carrion crows may have mutilated and partially eaten these fish, but it is improbable that such small birds could have held and pulled out of the water so powerful a fish as a jack of three pounds weight. An otter had been seen there, but this was not this animal's method of devouring its prey.

feast at best without remorse? With quick strokes of his strong broad tail he gains upon the scurrying fish, in its own element, and snaps a morsel out, and sometimes is content



XXXII: 'A THOROUGH SPORTSMAN.'

with that! The gull, the cormorant, and sea birds of that ilk, take their scaly prey intact. The hawk and its congeners, with their telescopic eyes, mark from aloft the frightened leveret or terror-stricken mouse, and often make a meal of feathered kin!

‘ But where is the wren’s nest ? ’

‘ Another mile, and we’ll be there.’ And so we talked and pursued our way.

A pretty scene had caught my eye, and offered a tempting snapshot. A thorough sportsman (Plate XXXII) the little fellow looked as he stood intent upon his fishing rod.

Half an hour more, and we were at the highlands that had loomed before us all the time. Seen from a distance, they showed a dark green forest growth, relieved by patches here and there of softer pasture land, that purple haze beloved of painters bedewing all, and framed in a rim of fleecy cloud and sky of Italy. The sweet fresh odour of the new-mown hay was everywhere, borne from the haycocks ranged around in careless trim. We went past the barley in the ear ; a bright red poppy or a tiny scarlet pimpernel here and there, blazing, jewel-like, in striking contrast to the white convolvulus trailing at random on the ground. The may was blown, but in its place were pink roses and



XXXIII: THE KINGFISHER, MALE ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size); WITH 'THE LITTLE MINNOW THAT HE LOVES SO WELL.'

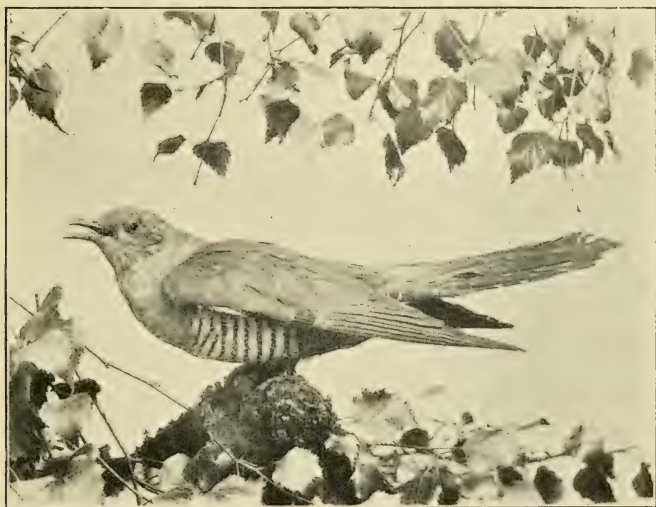
white elders. Willow tassels on the river bank still dangled from the bending boughs. The comfrey's curling head was in many a

spot, and sweet forget-me-nots were in full bloom. But what of other bird life in this pleasant spot? A flash of colour reveals the solitary kingfisher, darting straight as an arrow down the stream. If we could have watched and followed him, we might, by patient waiting, have seen this handsome fisherman seize with unerring beak the little minnow which he loves so well and return to his perch with it to gobble it up head first. The kingfisher generally builds its nest under an overhanging bank above the water's edge, often utilizing an old rathole or the like. The eggs are five or six in number, and pure white like most eggs laid in dark nests. Nest and eggs, therefore, are well concealed, and offer no chance to the photographer. The nest is nothing more than a collection of fish bones purposely brought there, or as some think vomited up by the birds; and the eggs are deposited upon the heap.

A cuckoo in the distance tells his mate that he is there.

We had caught sight of one in the train

as we came along. In size, the cuckoo resembles a pigeon or large hawk, but the flight of this bird, which is slow, its long tail, and uncommon appearance compared with



XXXIV: 'A CUCKOO IN THE DISTANCE TELLS HIS MATE THAT HE IS THERE.' MALE ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size).

birds more familiar in the countryside (especially if you catch sight of its barred breast), cannot fail to attract your attention. The cuckoo was once described by a Board-School child as 'A lazy bird that does not

lay its own eggs,' which was meant to express the fact, now common knowledge, that the bird does not build a nest but chooses that of some other bird, often that of the robin or hedge-sparrow, for the purpose of depositing its eggs. It lays only one egg at a time in each nest, ejecting one or two from the chosen nest in order to make room for it. The bird is said to lay it on the ground, and place it in the nest with its beak¹, for it is obviously impossible for the cuckoo to sit in the nest of such small birds. The great young cuckoo often proves a sad tax on its smaller foster-parents in the matter of rearing. They have often been observed to feed the hungry youngster well day after day, until he can provide for himself, whilst entirely neglecting their own young, which are frequently allowed to perish. It is alleged, too, that the cuckoo can vary the size and colour of its eggs according to the nest it chooses. The eggs are generally larger than those of its host, and of a reddish grey or greenish colour. On account of their robbing

¹ Some say with it's foot.

habits and fierce nature, cuckoos, like hawks and crows, are often mobbed by smaller birds. They arrive in this country at the beginning



XXXV: 'A NEST AGOG WITH FOUR HUNGRY GAPING BEAKS.' FEMALE ROBIN FEEDING ITS YOUNG ($\frac{1}{3}$ -size).

of April, leaving in July and August, or September at the very latest.

Larks are carolling overhead, luring us away by their song from the nests that hold their mates, concealed somewhere in the tall



XXXVI: 'USING HIS STRONG TAIL TO AID HIM AS HE MAKES HIS STEEP ASCENTS.' THE GREEN WOOD-PECKER, MALE ($\frac{1}{3}$ -size).

waving grass. The greenfinch and the linnet pipe their songs, and Cock Robin, the fearless, hops from bough to bough, twittering

out his little notes almost unheeding us—a trusting little bird. A search revealed the reason of his joy: we saw a nest agog with four hungry gaping beaks, waiting with eagerness the tender morsel or the worm.

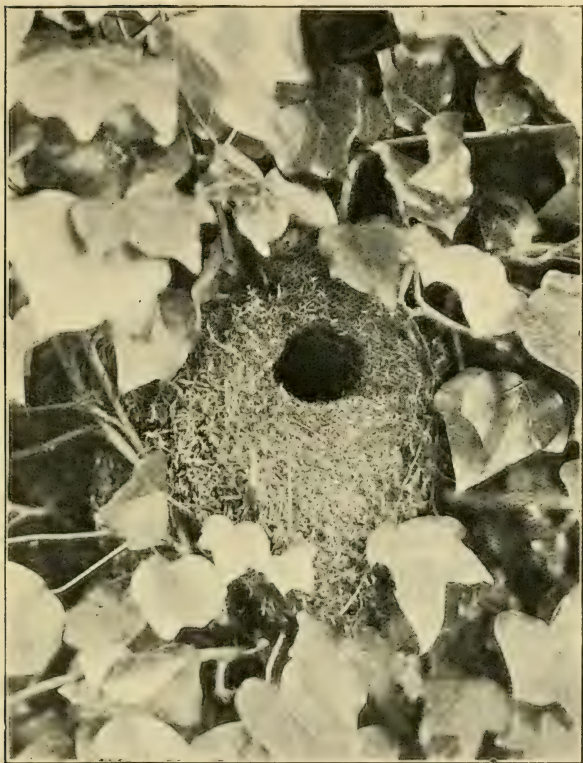
We heard the quick laughing ‘Glou, glou, glou, gluck’ of the green woodpecker, but did not even catch a glimpse of him. For this nimble climber is a most shy bird, and (using his strong tail to aid him as he makes his steep ascents) he quickly puts the tree or stump on which he climbs between him and yourself. Besides his characteristic notes, the well known ‘tap’ on the bark, to make the insects upon which he feeds forsake the cracks and crannies where they hide, will tell you where he is.¹ But to *hear* him tap, you

¹ Some doubt has been thrown on this generally accepted reason for the tapping, for woodpeckers kept in captivity have been observed to tap on the smooth bare planed posts of the large cage in which they were confined, which certainly did not harbour insects, and the birds did not appear to be searching for any. The habit may be simply for cleaning the point of the beak, in the same way as the canary so often does on the perch of its cage.

must hide yourself most carefully, and without making the slightest noise (for his sense of hearing is very keen) and await his advent with all the patience that you can command.

The hen lays five or six pure white polished eggs, in a dark cavity, which the pair generally makes for themselves out of some old rotten trunk, by continuous pecking with their beaks, leaving only a small hole of entrance. The eggs are merely desposited on the chips within. This arrangement, of course, baffles the photographer.

At last we reached the tree where Jenny Wren had built her nest. It was doubtless the one chosen for the home from more than one that had been begun and left, as is frequently the case, though no one has as yet discovered the reason. What a pretty nest it was; and what labour and skill were there! The home was large in proportion to the birds, and made up of moss and lichens glued in one, in a way that no man's hand could copy. It was feather lined within to hold the small white red-speckled eggs,



XXXVII: 'AND WHAT A PRETTY NEST IT WAS.' NEST
OF THE COMMON JENNY OR KITTIE WREN ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size).

and tucked daintily away in an old tree stump, and hidden safe from peeping eyes



XXXVIII: 'IN HER LITTLE WAY SHE FLITTED OUT.'
THE COMMON (JENNY OR KITTIE) WREN ($\frac{3}{4}$ -size).

by a green canopy of ivy leaves, which we most carefully drew to one side.

But Jenny had betrayed herself to Ted's

observant eye. If she had sat still without alarm, he might have passed the spot, but in her little way she flitted out, entreating with anxious chirps that her sweet home should not be harmed. Nor did we injure her ! There are a great many grown-up people who have never seen a wren, and who would not know one if they did, nor recognize its quick twitter if they heard the sound ! Jenny (Kittie is her cognomen too) is particularly fond of keeping to hedgerows, where she has continuous shelter for her tiny self. If you find and pursue her, she will keep you going for miles, until you will tire long before she gives it up. The birds are with us all the year. Many pretty country legends hang around this little bird, which is almost the smallest of our English inhabitants, though the gold-crested wren is smaller still.

The woodlands in which this wren's nest was built is a fine place for birds. The trees are thick and various, and the river is close by ; moreover it is not much frequented by that troublesome nest pillager, the country



XXXIX: NEST OF THE LONG-TAILED TIT ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

IT 'TAKES FIRST PLACE AMONGST THE HOMES OF
BRITISH BIRDS FOR ELEGANCE AND FOR MARVEL
OF CONSTRUCTION TOO.'

boy. We were loth to leave it without a
thorough search, especially as it was the time

in which to find birds' nests. However, with but little trouble Ted found another one—that of the long-tailed tit. The parent birds, as usual, by their evident distress guided us straight to the spot: right in the midst of a thick leafy may bush the elegant structure was concealed. We noted the exact place where it was built, and some time afterwards, when the young were flown, we came back to it, and carefully cutting all the branches down, took the photograph. It was constructed chiefly of lichens taken from the trunks of trees. Its outside appearance was much like the wren's (*see* Plate XXXVII), but it was a narrower oval, being only some five inches across. Several twigs traversed the nest in all directions, and showed the care, skill, and patience of the little birds. The nests of long-tailed tits have either one or two holes of entrance. This one had two. The bird goes in by one to sit upon the eggs or young, its long tail protruding out behind, and when quitting the nest naturally, or when alarmed, it leaves by the other hole. This is of course a most



XL : THE LONG-TAILED TIT ($\frac{2}{3}$ -size). 'EQUILIBRIST IS A TERM WELL APPLICABLE TO THE BIRD.'

convenient arrangement made to suit the four-inch long tail. The bird would obviously

have some trouble in turning if there were only one hole, and it seems strange that two are not always made. The structure is a fine example of a domed nest, and takes first place amongst the homes of British birds for elegance and for marvel of construction too.

The long-tailed tit is easily distinguished from the five other British tits by the length of its tail, which also has a white feather on each side all the way down. The other tits are the blue, the great, the marsh, the crested, and the cole tit. The long-tailed tit may often be seen in winter as well as in summer in our gardens. Like the blue tit (tomtit), its habits are very active, assuming all sorts of positions in its ceaseless search for food. Equilibrist is a term well applicable to this bird, for it uses its tail to balance itself, like a tightrope walker with his pole, only that the tail is always kept straight downwards, which in some positions gives it a very grotesque appearance. The shape of the body somewhat resembles a bottle, from which

circumstance it is often called the bottle tit.

* * * *

Returning but purposely going another way to find some more nests if possible,



XLI: 'THE OLD-TIME VILLAGE WITH ITS PRETTY CHURCH—AND WELL-WORN STOCKS—THE ANTIQUATED LITTLE GUARD HOUSE JUST BEHIND.'

we passed through the old-time village with its pretty church, whose mantling tower was now casting shadows on the well-worn stocks (that in the good old days held vagrants and trespassers fast in durance vile), with the

antiquated little 'guard house' just behind. We did not seek in vain : for as we reached the river bank, and where two trees had fallen right across the stream (hidden behind their naked trunks, just where they met) we found a moorhen's nest with seven eggs. A queer spot this to build a nest upon a floating tree ! but concealment and construction were well planned. For no one would have thought to find a nest upon a floating tree ! And yet, the structure was quite safe, rising as the water rose, and sinking as it fell. The nest was badly placed from the photographer's point of view, and with the camera and the legs as a burden, it would have needed a rope walker's skill to get at it, though those tall flags in yellow bloom behind, and stately bulrushes close by, with light green duckweed in the foreground would have framed well upon the camera screen. In the river depths close to the bank, and motionless, but with his wicked eye alert for any prey that might pass by, there lay a jack, at home, waiting the day when he could close

his cruel jaws upon the little hens that soon would swim above his lair. For the jack loves small ducks and suchlike things whereof to make a meal. Nor does this cruel monster, with an iron maw well armed with teeth, the tiger terror of the deep still stream, spare the young of his own kind when his appetite is keen.

But we were in luck. 'Did you see that wild duck in the reeds? I'm sure his mate is there also. Yes, there she is, they are feeding quietly,' said Ted. 'Do let us try to get a snapshot of the pair,' said I. But the female duck was shy, though *he* was bolder, and kept swimming round, to see that all was safe. When we got near the pair had disappeared. But focussing upon an outlet in the reeds, which the drake, a fine mallard, had made for himself and which was evidently his favourite swim, I had not long to wait and added one more picture to our list. Not being after nesting-time he had lost the curly feathers at the end of his tail, and was in sombre garb (this curious change of plumage

lasts for about two months), but he made a fine show for all that.

Then on we went to catch the train. We passed through the clover fields and corn,



XLII: COMMON WILD DUCK, MALE, IN NESTING PLUMAGE ($1\frac{1}{3}$ -size). IN HIS FAVOURITE SWIM.

along the little pathway shaded by tall poplars, whose leaves made music in the evening breeze, until we crossed the moor again, where peewits pecked for grubs before

they settled down for their night's rest (or, if hungry, for their nocturnal feast, on worms and grubs that leave their runs at night). And jackdaws on the grass were busy with their evening meal and talk.



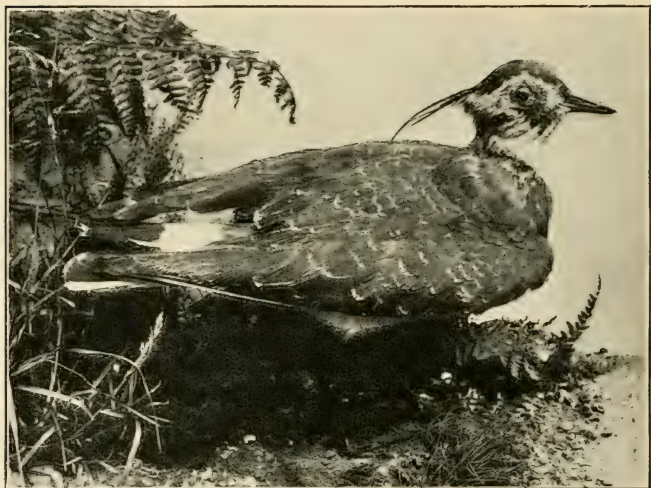
XLIII : NEST OF LAPWING (PEEWIT) ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size).

Earlier in the year, in April, I had secured a photo of a peewit's nest. It was merely a slight hollow scratched in the ground, under a tuft of grass. The birds showed all the cleverness, for which they are so famed,

in deceiving you as to the position of their nests. Uttering their plaintive 'Pee-wit' cries and flying and swooping in an agitated way, you think they are quite near the nest, whereas the wily hen, on seeing your approach on the flat land (which they can do while you are yet half a mile away), quits the nest and runs for many yards before she takes to wing, and is then joined by her watching mate, who joins her in the ruse. The eggs of the peewit vary much as to colour, and copy the light or dark shade of the surrounding grass, so that they may be the better hidden in the exposed spots in which the nests are built. This is a good example of the instinct of self-preservation, which is the first law of nature in us all. The eggs are well known as table delicacies. The earliest found, about Easter time, sometimes fetch in London half a crown each. They are therefore eagerly sought after by shepherds in the Fens. This wholesale destruction has of course much diminished the number of these useful grub-destroying birds in this country. If done to

provide food or a relish for an invalid, the destruction might perhaps be tolerated.

Any one who has lived or spent any time in the country, near low-lying land, must be



XLIV: A LAPWING, OR PEEWIT, MALE ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size), PERCHED UPON THE GROUND.

familiar with these birds, whose lazy flight with lapping wings, (several in a flock), apparently without aim, but really directed to fresh feeding ground, cannot be mistaken when once seen. This apparent apathy

they exhibit, too, in the matter of nest building, as the photograph will show. At the same time they are capable of the swiftest movements in flight. I well remember once after having been lost in a fog, and wandering all night, near the summit of Penmaenmawr mountain in North Wales, how some lapwings disturbed by my presence as the day broke (a most unusual occurrence for them at this hour in their mountain solitudes), swooped over and past me swift as an arrow from a bow, endeavouring to discover who was the intruder in their mountain home, and what he wanted there. And how too I was deceived in imagining the 'Pee-wit' cry of one of them perched upon the ground (only a few yards away, though I did not see it for some time) to be the whistle of some country yokel, who sought to attract my attention and put me in the right way home!

* * * * *

Just as we crossed a bit of rough ground, out jumped a hare, and we could feel the warmth

that pussy's coat had left in the neat form wherein she had lain,—disturbed perhaps in her first dreams. Young starlings, too, we startled from amongst the long young grass. For as the day was nearly done, they sought this shelter for the night (a roosting-place of which the youngsters are very fond), leaving behind the impress of their feathery forms. A taste of tempting watercress which now was in white bloom, and we had gained the road once more ! And though the camera and legs felt heavy on our backs, and we were dust besmeared, and our feet dragged, weary from our trudge, those little inconveniences were soon forgotten as we sank into our armchairs once again, and reviewed in pleasant talk the achievements of the day.

CHAPTER VI

OUR LAST HUNT OF THE SEASON FOR BIRDS' NESTS : LATE JUNE

As the month was well advanced and we had no time to lose if we wished to find more nests, we arranged another day for our engrossing work.

I had seen a house-sparrow's nest on the topmost branches of a sycamore which grows behind my house.

Ted climbed the tree with ease, and said it was like 'going up his stairs to bed'. I left him to report to me *below* what he found in the nest. 'One addled egg.' 'That will do,' said I. So, as the branches of the sycamore were far too frail to hold a man (or two) and camera, we decided that the tree top must come down. A few strokes through the soft wood with a saw, and Ted lowered the branch and nest as

carefully as could be, to keep the whole intact. It was a well-made nest, built up of hay and straw, with here and there an empty barley head and a few bits of string. It was globular in shape, about the size of a football, and lined within by feathers of all kinds, and on one side was a neat round hole that led deep down to where the one white grey-speckled egg was laid. Now such a structure was a great surprise to me. Had I been asked which British bird I thought the greatest slattern in the art of building nests, the sparrow would most certainly have first occurred to me. So, after all, our little sooty friend, that we associate with bricks and chimney tops, and blame so much for all the mischief that he does (especially in spring time, to our flower beds and plants) is an artificer of note.

He builds a nest with an artistic eye, studying both shape and symmetry, when he can get a good foundation for the work. We all have seen it, most often in a gutter or under some projecting eave, and chok-



XLV: 'A WELL-MADE NEST BUILT UP OF HAY AND STRAW.' NEST OF THE HOUSE-SPARROW IN A SYCAMORE ($\frac{1}{6}$ -size).

ing too our water pipes sometimes, and here the nest seems but a motley jumble of sticks



XLVI: 'AN ARTIFICER OF NOTE.' HOUSE-SPARROW
BUILDING HIS NEST ($\frac{1}{5}$ -size).

and hay and straw, with bits of paper, cloth, and string, and other odds and ends, just to relieve the eye. Or are these materials

the easiest he can find upon the dustheaps and the road? But see here how the bird has studied to protect the nest. The leaves above form quite a roof to keep off the rain drops.

This was no doubt a second or third nest (the house-sparrow builds three or four nests each year), at this late season, and hence the single addled egg. And when brooding time is done, with the result that more chirpers are added to the busy throng (for some at least of these will survive sparrow clubs and cats, and rats and hawks and other dire foes), the old birds and their young will join the Sparrows' Parliament that holds its noisy meetings in the autumn, amongst the branches of the lime trees over there, chirping out each evening before dusk the doings of the day, and prospects for to-morrow's meat and drink, with admonitions to the youngsters not to be too cheeky in their acts of pilfering or play. I was very interested when in Montreal some years ago to see house-sparrows imported

from England, quite at home, just as they are in the old country.

When we had got the sparrow's nest exposed we made our way down to the boat, to spy



XLVII: 'TED WAS NOT LONG IN PULLING ROUND TO WHERE WE STARTED FROM.'

the land out yet again, for more islands still remained that we had not visited. Ted was not long in pulling round to where we started from. Approaching the island from the south and sunny side, some alders on the north,

with many leafless boughs and trunks much bent, showed plainly how cold gales from north and east played havoc with what otherwise would have been fine trees. They told us also, as we shortly saw, that birds discriminate as well as human beings. Landing through a bank of sedges and high reeds we noticed that the undergrowth on this side close to the water's edge was honeycombed with runs. The cause was plain, for, somewhere not far off, a short dull croak told of the birds that made these runs their haunt, and set us looking in the neighbourhood for what we had not long to seek—a moorhen's nest.

Built some two feet from the ground, and like that of the sedge warbler amongst young growth (Plate XXIV), the instinct of the birds in this case too had placed it there, so that it would rise still higher as the reeds grew up. We counted twelve reddish-white, brown-speckled eggs in the nest, and one had fallen out, either ejected purposely, or knocked out as the frightened bird had hurriedly left

her patient vigil on our approach. How one small bird could cover such a clutch was not quite clear. So we concluded that *two* birds had laid their eggs in that same nest, which



XLVIII: 'A MOORHEN'S NEST—WITH TWELVE REDDISH-WHITE BROWN-SPECKLED EGGS' ($\frac{1}{6}$ -size).

is their custom sometimes, for reasons of their own.¹

¹ The explanation of this proceeding does not seem

This nest was built of dried sedge leaves and well decayed reed blades, materials of which plenty were at hand, their harshness being modified by short brown bents of reed a-twelve-month old lining the interior. The old hen bird, concealed from view, had scurried through the stems, and now joined by her mate popped out into the water, quite some fifty yards away, to inspect the rude invaders of their shores. The pair were joined by a female wild-duck, which flew and swam away in evident alarm, showing us clearly that she too had got a nest or young to guard. After a search conducted with great care, we found the cause of her solicitude. A brood of ducklings (waddling little mites, which would not or could not venture far into the deep, but popped in and out amongst the runs, or took short quick paddles close to the shore), led us a wild goose chase in order to get even a glimpse of them ! Now scared and flapping wildly round and round the to have been ascertained. Ted had found a moorhen's nest up the Thames, containing eighteen eggs.

old bird kept a constant eye on them and us.

Noisy carrion crows had flown out from the island when we came, but no trace of a nest appeared. As we tore our way through heavy bushes and thick grass, I spied a round slate-coloured object in a tree, and thought I had made a great discovery. When lo ! the object fluttered to the ground. It was a fledgling carrion crow. Hence the colour of the plumage. But when I bolted after it through thick and thin, the wily bird, though still so young, eluded my endeavours to make him prisoner, and soon was lost amongst the undergrowth, safe from pursuit and further harm. 'Next season we must be earlier on the scene, and try to find the nest that doubtless will be built up there', said Ted.

As I stood, quite hidden by the leaves above my head, a young chaffinch family (keeping together as they always do), disturbed by my friend a few yards further on, came fluttering back almost within my reach. A



XLIX: A MOORHEN'S NEST CONCEALED IN REEDS
($\frac{1}{20}$ -size).

merry little group of five they were, rejoicing in the fact that they could fly, the old birds tweeting out their approbation as they hopped

from bough to bough. We did not find more nests on 'Moorhen Island' (as we named these shores), and so we rowed away, feeling like two explorers in an unknown land,



L: MOORHEN (WATER-HEN) YOUNG COCK ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size)

so seldom were these quiet bird haunts visited.

A shelving shore and clean white sand invited us, and so we beached the boat and landed in a trice. Our quick approach dis-

turbed another moorhen that had built a nest concealed in reeds that grew close by. She took a noiseless dive, and then, with dangling legs which touched the water as she



LI: 'A MOORHEN'S NEST ($\frac{1}{2}$ -size). BUILT IN A CON-
SPICUOUS SPOT.'

flew (the typical moorhen flight) she sped away, and left us—doubtless with the hope that we would not disturb the seven speckled eggs she left behind in her nice nest.

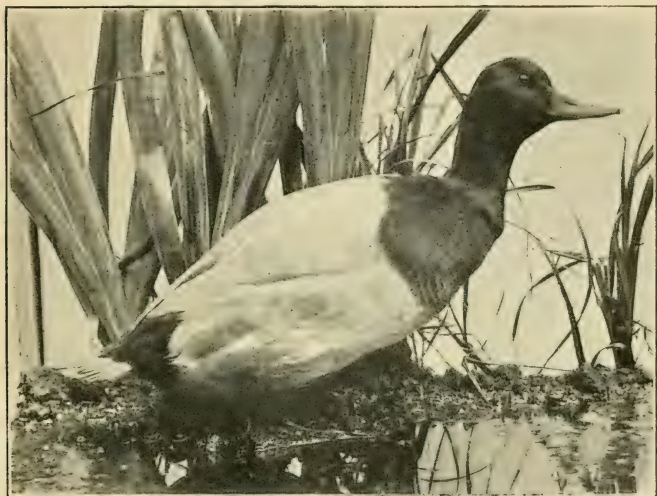
Her hopes were realized, for photographing nests does not harm them.

The moorhen is by nature a shy bird, though at times, if not molested, will become quite tame. She will, however, always leave the nest as you approach. It is curious that sometimes the nest is well concealed, whilst at others it is built in a conspicuous spot.

The sportsman finds the birds, with their straight flight, easy victims to his aim. One single pellet, too, is enough to bring them down, and I have seen one drop from the impact of a wad alone.

This island was so thickly planted that we could make very little headway through the dense greenery, so we rowed round hoping that we should be successful in our hunt whilst in the boat. This led to a find which much gratified us both : a few feet up, from off a low bank of sand and mud, a duck flew madly out. She dived at once, a quick wild dive, remaining under water a long time, and did not show

herself again till she was fifty yards away: this manœuvre she repeated all the while that we were there. 'No common wild duck, that,' said I, for the smaller size and different



LII: THE POCHARD (WILD DUCK), FEMALE ($\frac{1}{4}$ -size).
'HAS A LIGHT-COLOURED BODY, DARK CHESTNUT HEAD, AND GOLD-RED EYES, WITH BREAST OF DEEP BLACK HUE.'

shape, the light coloured body, dark chestnut head, gold-red eyes, and breast of deep black hue told me the difference at once.



LIII: 'AND THIS HER NEST, A POCHARD'S HOME'
($\frac{1}{8}$ -size).

Ducks, as a rule, are very shy, and as we knew this fact, we looked at once towards the bank from which she came, to see what

cause had kept her there, allowing us to get so near. She had risen, moreover, in a manner that implied a nest. Yes, sure enough, amongst a few small sticks, arranged with no great care, in a slight hollow roughly banked up with still-wet weed and sand and mud, and shaded by the branches of a may tree overhead, we saw four light-buff eggs, the first instalment of her clutch, or else a second nest.

And this her nest was a pochard's home (and 'Pochard Island' was the name we gave the spot). How different this nest was to the neat oval structure, lined with feathers, of her sister duck, which we had found the other day. These birds, unlike in the present instance, construct a well made nest, concealing it with care. The female lays from ten to twelve eggs, which are usually covered during incubation with down from the parents' breasts.

One island remained on which to try our luck. Again some carrion crows cawed out their views as we rowed up, and then fled

precipitately. We thought that they were concerned about a tree which had been chosen for a nest which they had begun. It was a second nest, but no eggs had been laid as yet. We named the island after them, for they had sole possession of the place. No other birds had ventured to intrude, well knowing that if eggs were laid close to these haunts, they would form a speedy meal for these bold marauders. Indeed they might have paid more dearly still, and sacrificed their own lives, for cannibals they doubtless are, these birds with feathers black, and beaks that love both living and dead meat. 'Perhaps another time,' said I, 'we'll pay these sable tyrants a lengthier visit and at an earlier date.'

Just after this we spied, away down on the mainland shore, our friends the swans, the three young cygnets they had hatched in May (now some three weeks old), sunning themselves, their parents looking fondly on, upon the bank. 'A snapshot if they will only stop!' And stop they did, letting me have

four snaps of them. I got three groups whilst the birds were on the shore, and one just as they took the water for a swim, observing even in their baby days the naval



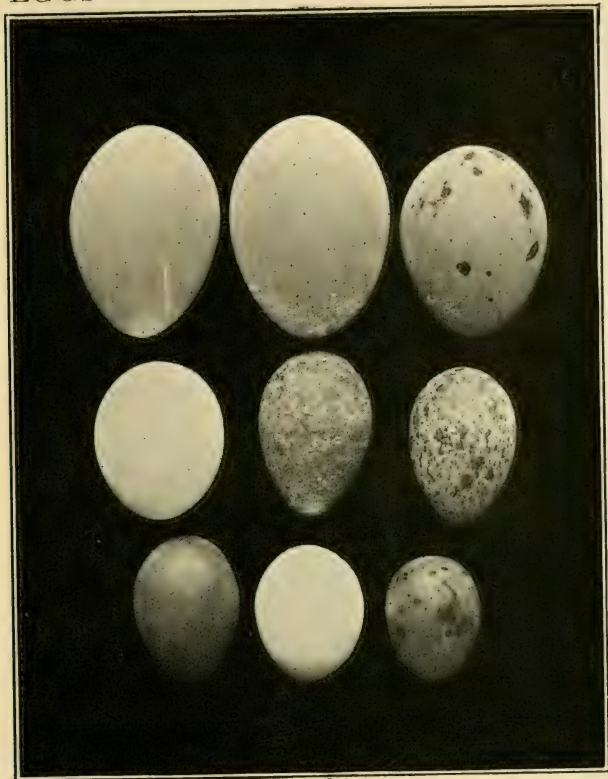
LIV: PARENT SWANS, WITH CYGNETS, SOME THREE WEEKS OLD, 'JUST AS THEY TOOK THE WATER FOR A SWIM.'

order 'line ahead,' an order which wild swans, like ducks, always observe when on migratory flight.

And now our pleasant rambles for a time

were done. And looking back upon our work, we had good cause, we thought, for mutual felicitations on our luck, and visions for another year, starting earlier in the season, if Providence should permit.

EGGS OF THE BIRDS DESCRIBED¹



LV (NATURAL SIZES).

STARLING
Pale greenish-blue
KINGFISHER
Pure polished ivory-
white
NIGHTINGALE
Dark brown, with a very
deep olive-green tinge

GREEN WOODPECKER
Pure polished white
CUCKOO
Grey, tinted reddish
or greenish
WRYNECK
Pure white

THRUSH
Light greenish - blue,
speckled black (most
spots at larger end)
HOUSE-SPARROW
Pale grey (or pale green)
streaked and spotted
blackish

BLACK-HEADED BUNTING
Brownish, or greenish to purplish-
brown (or purplish-white) streaked
with same but darker colour

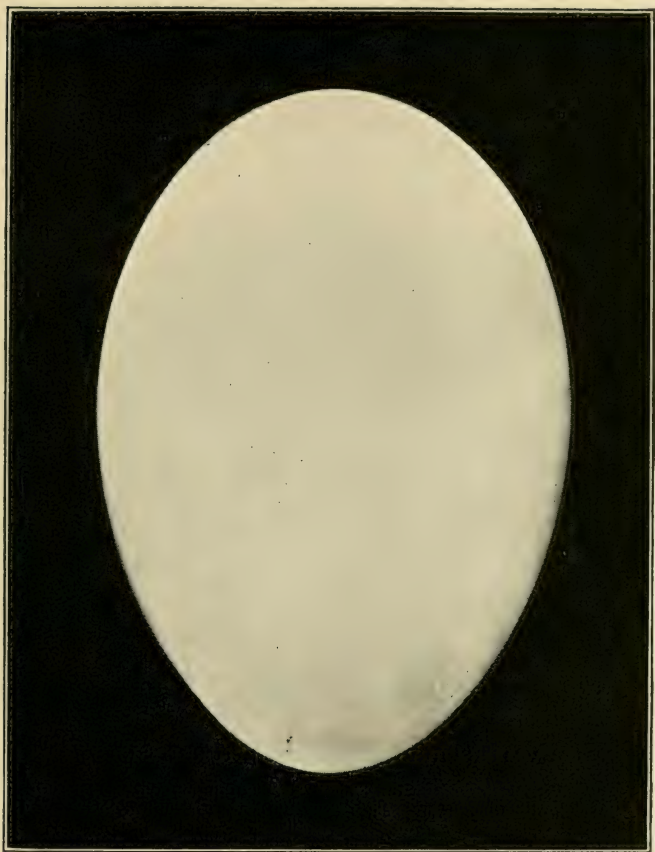
¹ Generally speaking, the larger the bird the fewer eggs it lays. The period of incubation varies with the species, but is



LVI (NATURAL SIZES).

LAPWING Dark olive-brown irregularly blotched with brownish-black (depth of colours vary)	SEDGE WARBLER White, speckled with brown	MOORHEN Reddish-white speckled and spotted with brown
BLUE TIT Pinky-white, spotted with reddish-brown at larger end	CREEPER White, more or less spotted reddish-brown	LONG-TAILED TIT White, or white with a few small specks of red
		COMMON WREN White, with a few red spots

always the same for each species—so that all the eggs laid are hatched at the same time. The period of hatching (duration of incubation) for the birds herein mentioned is *about* three weeks. The shades and markings and even the colours of birds' eggs vary considerably.

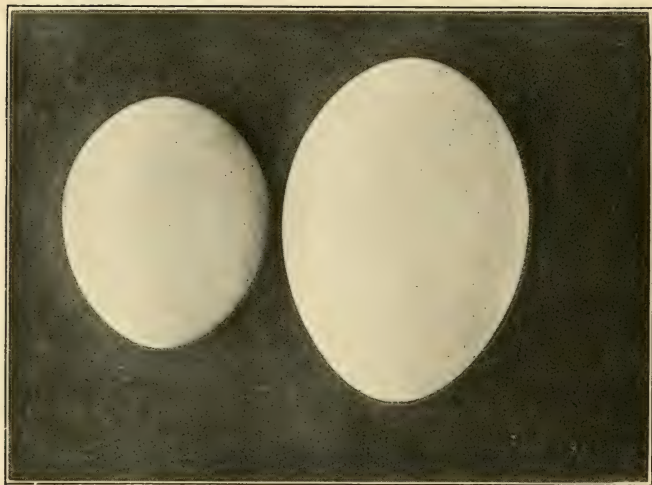


LVII (THREE-FOURTHS NATURAL SIZE).

SWAN ($\frac{3}{4}$ -size)

Greenish-white

(The marks on the egg are due to its being soiled)



LVIII (THREE-FOURTHS NATURAL SIZES).

POCHARD (or POACHARD)
White, with a buff or green tinge

COMMON WILD DUCK
Greenish-white

SYNOPSIS AND ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF THE BIRDS MENTIONED

I. BLACK-HEADED BUNTING

(Pages 53-56)

Emberiza schœniclus (one of the *Conirostres*—beaks more or less cone-shaped and strong—as the sparrows, finches, linnets, larks, starlings, tits, etc). **Syn. :** *Reed Sparrow*, *Passerine Bunting*, (Lat. *Passer*, a sparrow). *Water Sparrow*, *Reed Bunting*, *Black Bonnet*, *Chink*. The origin of the word *Bunting* is unknown. Resembles the common house-sparrow (whence synonyms) but is rather larger, has a black **head**, and a brown **tail**, which it often expands showing white feathers. **Found** chiefly near streams and where there are plenty of reeds, rushes, etc. **Flight :** undulating. Movements very active. **Not migratory**, but may go northwards in spring. **Length :** 6 to 7 inches. **Note :** ‘Sherrip,’ often twice repeated, and chiefly when on the wing. *Chink* means a short sharp, metallic sound, and refers to the bird’s note. **Food :** Insects found near water, chiefly. **Plumage :**

MALE—*In summer*—head, chin and throat black, with a white collar, and a white streak from neck to collar. Breast, dull bluish-white and brown. Wings, black and brown. Tail, forked, brownish-black with outside feathers white. *In winter*—head greyish, and the colour generally not so pronounced. FEMALE—Smaller than male; head, brownish; collar, brown; breast, white. **Nest**: Early in May. *Situated*: near ground, close to water, in low growth found there (grasses, rushes, sedges, brambles, etc.). About 3 inches across inside, cupped, rather shallow. *Made of*: fine rushes, hay, and hair; lined with moss, hair and thin root fibres. **Second nests**: Sometimes, and even as late as July. **Eggs**: Vary from brownish or greenish to purplish-brown or purplish-white, streaked with same but darker colours. Four or five.

2. BLUE TIT

(Pages 33–36)

Parus cæruleus (one of the *Coniurostres*. See Black-headed Bunting). **Syn.**: *Tomtit*, *Titmouse*. (*Tit* is a word loosely applied to anything small, especially birds. Icelandic: *Tittr*.) A pretty and most active little bird, often seen in English gardens in summer and winter, and found in wooded districts chiefly. **Migratory**, but may remain with us all the year

round. **Plumage** : Head, blue ; wings, blue edged with white ; tail and legs, blue (hence name) ; breast and under part of body, greenish-yellow. **Length** : $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 inches. **Flight** : Jerky and short. **Habits** : Never at rest, assuming all sorts of positions on and around twigs and boughs. **Note** : A feeble "tweet, tweet." **Food** : Insects, etc., found in crevices of bark, also fruits, fond of fat and cheese, and will eat flesh at times. **Nature** : Audacious, even attacking larger birds. **Male and female** : Much alike. **Nest** : In March or April. Well constructed, deep. *Situated* in holes and hollows, and sometimes very odd places (as spouts etc.), adapting the nest according to the size of the cavity chosen, and filling up the surroundings with nest material. *Made of* grass, soft hair and moss, lined with feathers (chiefly), hair and wool. **Second nests** : Probably not. The parents and young keep together till autumn. **Eggs** : Pinky-white, spotted with reddish-brown at larger end. Seven to ten.

3. CREEPER

(Pages 36-38)

Certhia familiaris (one of the *Tenuirostres* —slender-beaked birds—as the humming bird, nut-hatches, etc.).
Syn. : *Tree Creep*, *Tree Climber*. Creeps, aided by its

stiff tail kept pressed against the tree or bough, up and along the trunks and branches of trees (whence synonyms and name) in short quick jerks and with rapid fluttering of the wings like the green woodpecker (which see). Is shy and seldom seen, but reveals its presence by its " twee twee " notes. **Found** in England all the year round, in woodlands mostly. **Length** $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. **Flight** : Undulating, only from tree to tree. **Food** : Insects, etc., in bark, etc. **Plumage** : Back and sides of head and back ashy brown, with dull white spots ; chin, throat and breast whitish. Tail, stiff and curved downwards, reddish, or ashy-brown, outer edge yellowish. Claws, long and much curved. **Male and female** : Alike in size and plumage. **Nest** : In April. Well constructed. *Situated* in a hole or crack of a tree, the entrance often closed in by various materials. *Made of* twigs, fine roots, hay, straw, grass, etc., lined with wool and feathers. **Eggs** : White, more or less spotted reddish-brown. Four to eight.

4. CUCKOO

(*Pages 76-79*)

Cuculus canorus (one of the *Scansores*—birds with feet adapted for climbing—as the wryneck, woodpecker, parrots, etc.). About the size of a small pigeon or large

hawk. Recognized by its uncommon mode of flight which is rather heavy and slow, ashy coloured **back** transversely barred **breast and lower part of body**, which are of a lighter ashy-white shade, its ashy **tail** tipped with white, and its well-known note (whence name) which is uttered when flying or just after settling. The hen sometimes utters a very musical and peculiar note, rendered peculiar, some think, by the bird having its own egg in its mouth, and seeking a nest wherein to deposit it. **Migratory** : Arrives in the beginning of April, leaves in July or August or September at latest. **Length** : about 14 inches. **Habits** : Wandering, and very pugnacious. **Haunts** : Woodland country chiefly. **Food** : Caterpillars (especially), snails, grasshoppers, flies, beetles, etc. **Bill** : Somewhat curved, red inside. **Nests** : Does not build any, but deposits its eggs in the nests of smaller birds, as the hedge-sparrow, fly-catcher, blackbird, robin, and others. One egg deposited in each nest. **Eggs** : Grey, tinted reddish or greenish.

5. GREEN WOODPECKER

(Pages 80-82)

Picus viridis (one of the *Scansores*. See Cuckoo).
Syn. : *Popinjay* (from a word meaning *parrot*, referring to the gay colours of the bird), *Tongue Bird*, *Yaffle*

(from its note), *Gally Bird* (presumably also from its note.) **Distinguish** it from the spotted woodpecker. The green woodpecker is larger, and is of a greenish colour (hence name), with a crimson crest and crimson 'moustache' (streak of crimson, absent in the female). Much commoner. The wings and tail are blackish, with transverse rows of square brownish spots. **End of tail quills** pointed. **Tongue** : Long and silvery (hence synonym). **Taps** on bark with its beak to eject insects (whence name). **Nature** : Very shy, and heard more often than seen. **Note** : variously described (and see page 81). **Not migratory**. **Length** : About 13 inches. (Spotted woodpecker only 10 inches.) **Flight** : Undulating, heavy, and only from one tree to another. **Climbs** trunks, usually in a circular manner, by the aid of its tail close pressed to the wood (like the creeper, which see). Descends backwards. **Haunts** : Fond of old *decayed* trees. **Food** : Insects found in bark, etc. **Nest** : In April. *Situated* in holes in *old* trees, made by the birds pecking with their beaks till it is excavated (whence name). Small hole of entrance. Eggs simply laid on the chips and débris. **Eggs** : Pure polished white. Shell very transparent. Five or six.

6. HOUSE-SPARROW.

(Pages 99-104)

Passer domesticus (one of the *Conirostres*. See Black-headed Bunting). (*Sparrow* is from similar Saxon, Danish, Gothic, Icelandish, etc., names for the bird, commencing with *spar*, *spur*, *spor*, or *spear*.) Distinguish it from the tree-sparrow, which has a white neck with a triangular black spot on each cheek, is found mostly away from houses, builds generally in a hole in a tree, wags its tail frequently, and lays dull white eggs, speckled all over with light greenish-brown. The *House Sparrow* lays pale grey eggs, streaked and spotted blackish. It is **not** migratory. **Length** : 5 to 6 inches. **Note** : a chirrup. When combating its rivals at nesting time the chirrups are very frequent and noisy. (Compare the word *spar*, a boxing term.) The chirrup to the hen on first waking at dawn is modified to a soft musical note. **Food** : Almost anything eatable. **Plumage** : Its black and brown colours are more pronounced in the male, which also has a black throat. **Nest** : In March, as soon as the weather permits. **Situation** : Either large and loose when built in houses, and globular with a hole for entrance at one side if in a tree. **Made of** all sorts of materials that are easiest found and most attractive, but hay and straw are the foundation. Lined with feathers or any soft material. **Second nests** : Three

or four built each year, up to July or even August. **Eggs** : Pale grey or pale green, streaked and spotted blackish. Six generally.

7. KINGFISHER

(Pages 75-76)

Alcedo ispida (one of the *Syndactyles*—external and middle toes partly joined—as the fly-catcher, etc.). Unlike any other British bird in shape and plumage. Colour (especially of back) very brilliant. **Back and tail** brilliant green shading to emerald-blue. **Breast and front of body** rusty red. **Beak** : Long. **Flight** : Straight and very rapid, often up or down a stream. **Not migratory**, but in winter seeks unfrozen waters (as mouths of rivers) for fish food (whence name). **Length** : 7 inches. **Note** : A squeal when calling its mate. **Haunts** : Always near water, as it subsists on small fish (minnows, sticklebacks, etc.), and also water insects, beetles, leeches, etc. Fond of one spot, and same perch, from which to watch for its prey. **Plumage** : See above. Chin and throat white, also a white mark from back downwards. Tail very short (like most birds that dive). **Colour** brighter during breeding season. **Female** : Somewhat smaller than male, colours not so brilliant and bill shorter. **Nest** : In April or May. *Situated* : In cavities under overhanging banks of streams, often

in an old rathole 2 or 3 feet deep, but sometimes away from water. Always well hidden. *Materials* : The eggs are simply laid on a heap of fish bones, said to be vomited by the birds. *Eggs* : Pure polished ivory-white. Five or six.

8. LAPWING

(Pages 93-97)

Vanellus cristatus (one of the *Pressirostres*—flattened beaked birds—as the oyster catcher, dotterel, etc.). *Syn.* : *Peevit* (from its cry), *Crested Plover* (from its crest), *Green Plover* (from its plumage, and to contrast it with the *Golden Plover*), *Stone Plover* (the birds cleverly turn stones over to find the worms, grubs, etc., underneath them). **Known at once** by the crest, composed of a few feathers protruding horizontally backwards from its head, and which it can erect at will, and its (usual) mode of slow flight (often in flocks) ‘lapping’ its wings (hence name). Also by its plaintive ‘Pee-wit’ cry. **Inhabits** (chiefly) marshy ground and fallow lands. **Migratory**, but many remain the whole year. They wander far and often (mostly in flocks) in search of food. **Length** : about 14 inches. **Food** : Grubs and worms, etc., often taken at night when they leave their holes. A local flock will visit a recently ploughed field many times regularly at night.

fall. **Plumage** : Head and crest black and green ; cheek, white ; back and wings, olive-green shaded purplish-brown ; under part of body white ; legs red ; tail, white, tipped deep black. **Male and female** much alike, but colour of latter not so brilliant. **Bird and its eggs** : Edible. **Nest** : In February to March. One of the earliest of English birds to build—about the same time as the rook, and even before the sparrow, thrush, blackbird, robin, etc. *Situated* on the ground, in a shallow scratched-out hollow ; open. *Made of* a few pieces of grass, or at times only the hollow. **Second nests** : Sometimes. **Eggs** : Dark olive-brown irregularly blotched with brownish-black, the depth of the colours varying with the surroundings (for protection). Generally four.

9. LONG-TAILED TIT

(Pages 86-89)

Parus caudatus (one of the *Coniurostres*. See Black-headed Bunting). **Syn.** : *Bottle Tit* (from shape of body). Very active, always climbing about branches of trees, twigs, etc., in all positions, but with its 4-inch long tail (hence name) always hanging straight downwards. **Flight** : Heavy and undulating. **Note** : Twitters feebly. **Distinguish** the wagtails, which have also long tails which they wag constantly, and do not climb

like the long-tailed tit. Distinguish also the blue tit (which see), which has not a long tail but climbs about much like the long-tailed tit and is a smaller bird. (*Tit* is a word loosely applied to small things, especially birds. Icelandic, *Tittr.*) **Migratory**, but may remain in this country the whole year. **Length**: Of body 2 inches; tail 4 inches. **Haunts**: Wooded districts. **Food**: Insects on trees, buds, etc., and sometimes flying insects, gnats, etc. **Plumage**: Top of head and cheeks white, with a black stripe on each side of head; back, black and rosy-red; wings, black, quills edged white; under side of body, white; sides, rosy; legs and toes, black. *Female*: Blacker in head, but otherwise resembles male. **Parents and young** remain together during the first autumn and winter. **Nest**: In April or May. Beautifully constructed. *Situated* generally in a thick bush. More or less oval. Domed, with one or two holes, one for entrance and the other for exit. (In sitting the tail protrudes from one hole.) About 7 to 8 inches long by 5 or 6 inches broad. *Made* of lichens and moss (chiefly), glued together (like wren's nest, which see), lined inside with down and feathers. In some cases these birds use spiders' webs (which are of a gluey and elastic texture) in the construction of the nest—probably to aid in the glueing. **Eggs**: White only, or white with a few small specks of red. Ten or twelve, sometimes more.

10. MOORHEN (WATER-HEN)

(Pages 52-53, 91-92, 105-107, 109-112)

Gallinula chloropus (one of the *Macroductyles*—long-toed birds—as the rails, coot, etc.). Common, preferring still waters and slow streams. (*Moor* and *Water* are from the places in which the bird lives, and *hen* from its domestic habits). **Known**: By its general black plumage (when seen from a distance, see below), with a little white showing in wings and under the tail. By its beak which is greenish-yellow, and red where it joins the head, and a red mark running up the front of the head (the red is less marked in the female). Also by its green legs tipped red at the knee, its nodding head when swimming, and its mode of flight, which is low, rapid and straight, and when over the water close to it, with its legs hanging out behind and leaving a trail in the water. Also by its note, generally a single croak coming from where the bird is concealed. It is not shy by nature, but if much pursued becomes so, often diving (to get away from dogs) and holding on to the water weeds with only its beak protruding, and therefore not to be found. Also makes extensive runs in the rushes, etc., from which even the best of dogs may fail to dislodge it. Fond of living in communities, but 'get up' only one or two at a time when hunted. (The coot resembles the moorhen, but the former is

known at once by its larger size and its white beak and forehead, and is much rarer in most parts.) **Not migratory.** (Specimens, however, found from time to time in the Channel Islands must have come there from France or England.) **Length :** 13 to 14 inches. **Food :** Water insects found in mud and on floating débris, or in the soft earth of meadows, etc. **Plumage :** (see above) head, neck and breast, dark greyish-purple, almost black ; back, almost black, tinged olive ; under part of body, very dark purple ; wings, almost black, with a dark green tinge, and under parts streaked white ; tail, short, round, white underneath. **Male and female** much alike except the red on the beak as noticed above. **Edible.** **Nest :** In end of March. Well concealed or not. *Situated* either low down and near the water in reeds, rushes, etc., or some distance away in a bush and several feet from the ground. The young take to water very soon after hatching. (Moorhens are not web-footed though they swim easily, but slowly, but cannot perch properly, the legs and feet being more adapted for wading.) *Made of* materials growing close by (rushes, grasses, etc.), and lined with softer dried pieces of the same. About 6 inches across inside and deep in proportion, the materials being piled up from a low foundation. **Second nests :** Often. **Eggs :** Reddish-white, speckled and spotted with brown. Seven or eight, but sometimes even eighteen or twenty are found (laid by two birds).

II. NIGHTINGALE

(Pages 23-31)

Sylvia luscinia (one of the *Dentirostres*—toothed-beaked birds—as the warblers, wagtails, stonechat, thrush, blackbird, pipit, etc.). Owing to the unattractiveness of the plumage, which is merely brown on the back and greyish-white on the throat, chest, and under part of the body, these birds are easily overlooked. **Male and female** almost indistinguishable. Male only sings. To hear them sing (which they do both by day as well as by night; hence name, Anglo-Saxon *nihtegale*; *niht*. night, and *galan* to sing), the woodland haunts of a pair or community must be known and they must be noiselessly approached. They sing from late April¹ to early June during nest building and incubation time, after which they sing little, if at all. They arrive early in April, the males preceding the females by a few days, and leave in July or August. **Length**: About 7 inches. **Flight**: Rather heavy and short. **Notes**: Various, soft and very melodious, of a bubbling, gurgling, or warbling character, some notes sounding as if emitted from a reed. (The throat expands much during song.) **Food**: Insects and available ripe fruits. **Nature**: Defends itself, place of abode and nests fiercely against its own species or

¹ Sometimes even earlier.

other birds. **Nest** : In late April to early June. *Situated* : In a low bush or tree, or in a hedge or stump, and often near the ground. *About 3 inches across* inside, open. *Made of* : Grass, fine fibres and dead leaves, lined with horsehair and dead leaves. Rather loosely constructed. **Eggs** : Dark brown with a deep olive-green tinge. Generally five.

12. POCHARD OR POACHARD

(Pages 112-115)

Anas or *Fuligula jerina* (one of the *Fuligulæ*—ocean ducks, as opposed to freshwater ducks—to which also belong the geese, swans and pelicans, etc.). **Syn.** : *Red-eyed Plover*, *Red-headed Plover*, *Dunbird* (probably from its general *dun* colour), etc. One of the wild ducks that frequent our shores, and some inland waters, a few remaining here all the year round and breeding. The great majority, however, arrive in October and return northwards for breeding purposes in spring. It is rather smaller than the common wild duck, and more stumpy in appearance, and is distinguished at once by its dark chestnut-red head (hence synonym), contrasting strongly with the black breast and greyish-white back and under part of the body (these feathers have a beautiful silvery appearance and are beautifully

pencilled), tail dark grey-brown, and eyes golden red (whence synonym). The male has a pale blue beak, the female a black one. **Flight** : Rapid and strong (though the wings are small). Being very shy it often dives at once when disturbed, going a long way under water and can keep under for half a minute at a time. **Food** : Like that of other wild ducks, viz. weeds growing at the bottom of the water, soft-shelled fish, and other small fish when at the seaside. (Its name may be derived from a habit of "poaching" or "poking" its bill when feeding.) Feeds mostly at night. **Flesh** : Edible, considered a delicacy by some. **Nest** : April to June. *Situated* on the ground concealed amongst rushes, grasses, etc., and *made* of the same materials dried. The eggs, when the clutch is all laid, are covered with down from the parents' breasts. **Eggs** : White, with a buff or green tinge. Generally ten to twelve.

13. SEDGE WARBLER

(Pages 59-65)

Salicaria phragmitis (one of the *Dentirostres*, see Nightingale). A sleek little bird just 4 inches long, the head and back being coloured something like a sparrow, but with a greyish-brown streak over each eye, and the under part of the body being yellowish-grey. The head looks rather large for the size of the

bird. The beak, legs and claws are delicate. **Male and female** much alike. It frequents chiefly the sides of slow-running streams and is very active, popping in and out of the sedges (whence name), rushes, etc., with a noiseless, graceful and sliding movement. Not being very shy, it may often be observed at the distance of a few feet, in constant search of food. **Migratory**, being a summer visitor only. **Note**: The male sings with a beautiful continuous warble (hence name,) during incubation time, which is accentuated if the nest be approached, thus betraying its whereabouts. **Nest**: In May or June. Beautifully constructed. About $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches across inside, and proportionately deep. *Situated*: In sedges (whence name), rushes, long grass, etc., near water, and often in bushes not close to water, and woven round supporting stems. Well concealed. *Made of*: Chiefly wool, hair, fine fibres, etc.; lined with soft feathers and fibres. **Eggs**: Pale yellowish brown, obscurely mottled brown. Five generally.

14. STARLING

(Pages 38-42)

Sturnus vulgaris (one of the *Conirostres*. See Black-headed Bunting). This shiny bird, rather smaller than a blackbird, which looks plain black from a distance, but when viewed closely is seen to be speckled with

grey (the root of the bird's name is probably from these *star*-like marks: *ling* is a diminutive), and which has a strong and pointed beak (yellow in spring and dark coloured in winter), and frequents our chimneys, roofs and fields, is too well known to need description. **Migratory.** but many remain with us all the year. Enormous flocks proceed southwards on the approach of cold in October, and quantities come to us too in winter from northern countries. After nesting time the old and young birds collect and feed together in large communities. When the young can fly (in July and August) they delight to go to roost of an evening in high grass or rushes, when they can be almost walked over late in the evening. **Food :** Chiefly seeds, berries, worms, etc., but they are not always clean feeders. **Flesh :** Bitter. **Length :** About $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches. **Flight :** Rapid and strong. **Note :** A hesitating twitter with a sort of whistle up and down the gamut now and then and an occasional true note. This so-called song is frequently maintained for many minutes at a time. **Habits :** Restless. **Nest :** In end of March. *Situated :* In holes and stumps of trees, low down or out of reach, under gutters, or in haystacks, etc. *Consists of* a loosely arranged collection of hay, straw, roots, sticks, feathers, etc., with bits sticking out. Lined with any soft material. **Second nests :** Usually in May or June. **Eggs :** Pale greenish-blue (no markings). Shell very transparent. Generally five or six.

15. SWAN

(Pages 10-18, 57-59, 116-118)

Cygnus olor (one of the Duck family. See Pochard). *Mute Swan* (it makes no noise like some other swans, but at times gives a harsh cry). Everybody knows this great pure white bird, that has long been naturalized and bred in this country. (Saxon *Swan*, Danish *Swaan*, Swedish *Svan*, etc.) **Flight**: Heavy, rather slow for the size of the bird, but very powerful, the wings making a loud swishing noise. **Female**: Smaller than male, and not so ferocious. The birds are very fierce at nesting time. Young cygnets of a light bluish-grey colour till the moult. They are well protected and cared for by the parents during the first year of their life. **Food**: Water weeds plucked from the bottom of the water, also small fishes, fish spawn and worms, etc. **Flesh**: Edible. The young birds are sometimes eaten. (Swans were once exclusively royal property.) **Nest**: In April or May. *Situated*: On an island when available. Near water, on the ground. *Made of* reeds, grasses, etc., and sometimes half-dried water weeds. Loosely constructed. Generally about 3 feet long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad, and about 18 inches high; open, shallow. **Eggs**: Greenish-white. Six or seven. Sometimes dropped outside the nest. Often two or three are left unhatched.

16. THRUSH. COMMON SONG-THRUSH

(Pages 17-21)

Turdus musicus. Syn. : *Throstle* (the Latin root of the name is *Turdus*, *Throstle* is a diminutive), *Mavis* (French *Mauvis*, from an old Celtic root), etc. (One of the *Dentirostres*. See Nightingale.) Distinguish the *Missel* Thrush, which is much larger, being $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, the song-thrush only $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The spots on the chest and front part of the body of the missel too are fewer and larger. The *redwing* resembles the common song-thrush, but is smaller, has no spots, and is only seen here in winter. It utters a drawn-out plaintive cry, especially during flight—which may be represented by letters thus : *Tschi—uh*. The *fieldfare*, too, is like the song-thrush, but is larger. His note is ‘*chik chak*,’ and it shows pale grey behind, above his blackish tail. It, too, is only a winter visitor. **Not migratory** unless the cold be severe, when they go South in flocks. In winter many come to us from northern parts. A pair are seen together at nesting time—otherwise they live singly. **Haunts** : Almost everywhere. **Food** : Snails, worms, caterpillars, and garden and field pests generally, with ripe fruit also in summer. In winter they live on snails and berries. **Plumage** : Chiefly light and dark brown, the chest and front of body of a lighter shade with numerous black spots. **Male and female** almost

indistinguishable, but male only sings. **Note :** Besides the well-known song, the note of alarm sounded by the mother bird when tending the young out of the nest till they can fly for themselves is very characteristic. If a cat or dog, or even a human being, approach the young birds, the hen will fly about anxiously giving a series of quick sharp sounds like *Tchek*, or *Tchik*. To imitate it close the teeth, and press the tongue firmly against them, then withdraw it backwards suddenly and the sound will be made by the air rushing in sharply through the teeth. It is the sound we make when vexed, or when we sympathize with a person who has lost something, or who has been injured by somebody. The thrush's song is chiefly heard in spring, during nesting time, but also during winter if the weather be warm. The male in singing is fond of the same perch, which is generally at the end of a decayed or leafless branch near the summit of a tree. **Nest :** Well concealed, or not. In March. *Situated :* In various positions, but always off the ground. Open cup shaped, and lined inside with a thin coating of mud. (The blackbird's nest is *not* lined with mud.) **Second nests :** In May or June, sometimes even in July or August. **Eggs :** Light greenish-blue, speckled black. Most spots at the larger end. Five or six.

17. WILD DUCK (MALLARD)

(Pages 49-52, 92-93)

Anas boschas. (See Pochard.) (*Duck* is from an old root word meaning to bend the head, to dive. French *Malard*.) This ancestor of our common farm-yard duck, with which it sometimes fraternizes and interbreeds, may be distinguished from it by its smaller size and its plumage. The male when at his best has a shiny green head and neck with a yellowish-green beak, and a narrow but well-marked white collar. The chest is chestnut-brown, the back greyish-brown, and the under part of the body greyish-white. At the tail there are four short velvet-black feathers curled backwards. These curled feathers are lost during nesting time (July to October) and the colours generally then are less brilliant. The plumage of the female is brown and russet-grey. Migratory, but many remain in favourite spots, and often where hatched, all the year round, and may breed there. Large numbers arrive in early winter from northern countries, the time of their advent depending on the severity of the weather. Flight: Rapid and strong, often rising with loud quacks if taken unawares (but they are very wary). In their flight south they follow the course of rivers. When migrating, they fly very high, with necks fully extended, and in a long straight or sinuous line

following a leader, who is changed now and then. (Geese on migration fly generally in a V formation, but sometimes in a straight line.) **Flesh** : Edible, but may taste fishy if the birds have fed much at the seaside. **Skin and feathers** very thick and shot resisting. The birds too are very tenacious of life. **Food** : Leaves of water plants, small fish, insects, worms, slugs, etc. Coarse feeders. Feed mostly at night. **Nest** : In May. *Situated* : On the ground and close to the water almost always, but they have been known to build in trees, and even in a church steeple ! *Made of* : Grasses and sticks mixed with feathers, and freely lined with their own down. The male separates from the female as soon as hatching commences, and begins to undergo his moulting not getting back his brilliant colours till autumn. The mother bird exhibits great anxiety for the young, swimming about with them till (in two or three months) they can fly (they are then called flappers). The young take to the water as soon as hatched. **Eggs** : Greenish-white. Generally eleven or twelve, sometimes as many as fifteen.

18. WREN. COMMON WREN

(Pages 82-85)

Troglodytes europæus or *vulgaris* (one of the *Tenuirostres*. See Creeper). **Syn.** : Jenny or Kittie Wren. (Wren is from *Wrenna*, the old Saxon name of the

bird; *Jenny* and *Kittie* are names of affection.) If you find, in a bush or hedgerow, a very small rounded and plump, not very shy, and exceedingly active bird, with brown back, wings and tail, the wings and tail barred black, and the tail, which is flat, short ($\frac{3}{4}$ inch long) and blunt, and often cocked up, and a dark twinkling eye and a short beak, that bird is the common wren. It is generally alone except at nesting time. **Male and female** almost indistinguishable. **Inhabits** wooded districts chiefly, and wanders much. **Not migratory**, **Length of body**: About $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches. **Flight**: Rapid, short and bustling. **Food**: Mostly insects. **Nest**: In May or June. Generally well concealed. *Situated*: In various positions, on trunks, in ivy, thatch, etc. Beautifully constructed. Dome-shaped, about 8 or 9 inches long by 5 or 6 inches broad, with a hole of entrance near the top. *Made of*: Lichens, moss, roots, leaves and feathers, etc. Glued together to make a wall about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. *Lined* inside with soft feathers. (Compare nest of long-tailed tit.) Often two or three nests are partially or completely built before one is selected for the eggs. **Eggs**: Very small, white, with a few red spots. Generally six to eight.

19. WRYNECK

(Pages 31-33)

Yunx tigrilla (one of the *Scansores*. See Cuckoo).
Syn. : *Snake bird*, *Tongue bird*, *Cuckoo's Mate*. Few have seen this dark brown, red-eyed bird with snake-like movements, though many have heard its quick, loud and persistent 'Pee, pee, pee, pee' cry in early April (probably to attract the female) just before the cuckoo sings (hence synonym). It is somewhat larger than the sparrow (6 inches), and if you know the plumage of a woodcock you will recognize the wryneck, for they are much alike. It resembles the bark of dark coloured trees so closely as to escape detection. Look for it in wooded districts. Its often repeated note (see above) will guide you to its whereabouts. It is not shy, and generally alone except at nesting time. If you can catch one it will hiss at you (*Snake bird*). It is of a greyish ground colour, but variously marked, spotted and barred with dark brown, the chest being of a lighter colour. The outer feathers of the wings have irregular transverse rows of oblong black spots. The tail is rather long, blunt, and barred transversely. It does not use the tail to climb with, like the woodpecker, but nevertheless easily ascends trunks of trees and creeps along over and round boughs in short jerky creeps, expanding the wings slightly at times, and

keeps close to the bark, often protruding its long silvery tongue into the crevices (*Snake bird*, *Tongue bird*). If excited or alarmed, it wriggles its head quickly and in all directions (whence its name), erects the feathers on its head, and expands its tail. **Male and female** much alike. **Migratory** : Arrives early in April, and leaves in September. **Flight** : Heavy, undulating, and only from tree to tree. **Food** : Insects, etc., found in bark, or ants, caterpillars, etc., on the ground. (Here a good dog may sometimes catch one.) **Nest** : In April. *Situated* : In a hole in a tree, or the deserted hole of a woodpecker. *Made of* : grass, wool, hair, decayed wood, etc. The birds often return to the same nesting hole for several years in succession. **Eggs** : Pure white. Vary in number from five, eight, nine or even twelve.

BIRDS AND THEIR NESTS AND EGGS

Found in and near great
towns

BY
GEORGE H. VOS, B.A., M.B. (Cantab.)

Illustrated by reproductions of photographs
of each bird, its nest and eggs, made by the
author from Nature, and of incidental scenes.

SECOND SERIES



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Preface

THIS book is the second part of a description (illustrated by photographs) of the rambles of two friends in search of birds' nests near London. The first part was published in 1907.

The fact that the author's previous attempts have been accorded a very favourable reception encourages him to publish his records for another season, with the hope that a third part may follow in due course. The commoner birds found "in and near great towns" have been described, but there remain some, and others whose nests are rare and difficult to find or inaccessible when found. Also, visitors only must not be omitted.

The labour involved in and the time occupied by this work have been much greater than would appear to the reader. Nevertheless the author is glad to feel that he may

fill, to some small extent, a corner in the world of illustrative and educational natural history, so far as some British birds are concerned ; and these in turn are only a small though most interesting part of the works of the great Creator. I again acknowledge, with great pleasure, the valuable assistance of Mr. Alfred Hodgkinson in many ways.

CHAPTER I

WINTER AND THE ROBINS, AND HOW A PAIR MADE A CURIOUS MISTAKE

WINTER is not nesting time. But our little feathered friends can make mistakes sometimes. Such circumstances must have inspired Cowper when he wrote :—

It chanced upon a winter's day
... The birds conceiving a design
To forestall sweet St. Valentine,
Assembled on affairs of love.
But though the birds were thus in haste,
The leaves came on not quite so fast ;
And Destiny, that sometimes bears
An aspect stern on men's affairs,
Not altogether smiled on theirs.

This is what happened to a pair of robins in the winter of 1907. I was told on January 4 of that year that a robin's nest with four eggs could be seen in a secluded

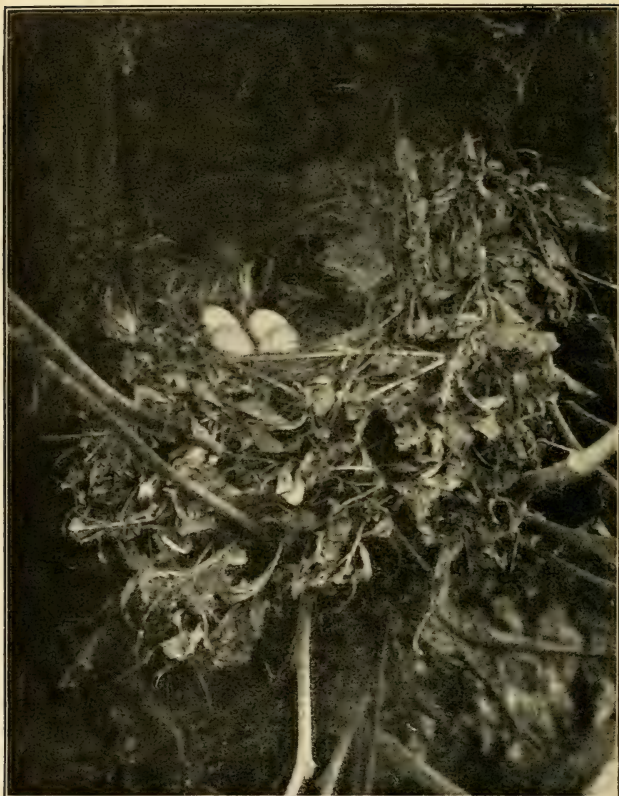


PLATE I: 'The birds must have been building on Christmas Day—almost a record time of the year this, for a robin's nest with eggs.' ($\frac{1}{3}$ size.)

garden on the outskirts of London. Having obtained a ready permission to photograph it,

I hastened thither on the 5th with my camera. It was built six feet from the ground, under the bole of a decrepit mulberry tree that of



PLATE II: Old mulberry tree under which the preceding nest was built.

course had no leaves as yet. The stump leaned westwards, thus protecting the nest on the east. (This tree, like many old trees, had a history. It was said to have been

planted by Queen Ann.) The nest was comfortably tucked into a cavity in the tottering trunk where once a branch grew. The limb had decayed and was sawn off close, and further rot had enlarged the hole. It was also partly supported by some young twigs, almost the dying effort of the aged stump. It was beautifully made of the dead and curled-up leaves of a privet (of which several bushes grew close by), on a foundation of sticks, and was neatly and plentifully lined with small soft feathers of various kinds. (This nest shows how birds often vary the material of their nests, choosing that which is nearest and the easiest to find. See the description of the usual nest of a robin further on.) The eggs were a reddish-white speckled all over with darker red. The birds must have been building on Christmas day! Almost a record time of the year this, for a robin's nest with eggs! How the nest would have fared is a matter of conjecture, but some thoughtless child checked all further development by robbing

it. The weather turned very cold, and the young, if hatched, would doubtless have perished. The following cutting is from the *London Daily Express* of January 26, 1907:—

‘A TOO-TRUSTING ROBIN.

‘Is it possible that a bird’s natural instinct tends to deteriorate by contact with civilization? . . . In a mulberry tree . . . a robin’s nest has been found this week,¹ containing four eggs. Clearly the birds mistook the recent mild weather, with a treacherous thermometer at 50°, for the happy, happy Spring time. Since then ten degrees of frost have corrected the illusion, and the contents of the nest must be regarded as refrigerated.’

The Robin, Robin Redbreast, or Bob, as he is sometimes called, is too familiar to need description. He is a common object in almost all parts of the country, and a

¹ Reporter’s date.



PLATE III: 'His twitterings in autumn, different in tone from those of spring and summer, surely foretell the coming winter.' Male robin ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

universal favourite. His twitterings in autumn, different in tone from those of

the spring and summer, surely foretell the coming winter, when we rejoice to feed him on the window sill with crumbs from the table.¹

He is a pretty bird and has a sweet song, so plaintive at times (especially at the close of the year when the leaves first fall, and at the evening hour), as to powerfully affect a sensitive mind. The bird is very fond of uttering a little sharp note, best spelt 'chit,' I think. It can be imitated if a penny be held horizontally between the left fore-finger and thumb, and struck sharply with the edge of another penny. Often, and on autumn days especially, you will hear this sound in your garden. You will find the bird alone. He will very probably flutter up to a bush near by when you have found him, and change his note to one of recognition, it seems—which is a twitter—with frequent flutterings of his wings and cocking of his tail. He is

¹ It has been asserted that these twitterings come from young birds that have not yet learnt to sing properly.

of a confiding nature, and does little or no harm to flowers or fruit, subsisting chiefly on insects and grubs. Who does not know how he will keep near the gardener when he is digging, looking for the unearthed worm, and almost hopping on to the spade in perfect confidence. Not only is he now looking for food, but his inquisitive nature attracts him to the spot, and he will perkily examine anything fresh in the garden. He is a delicately made bird, but is able, nevertheless, to withstand the severest cold of our winters. The wings are not strong, and so he is not capable of prolonged flight. He looks so gentle, and has such a trustful soft eye, that none could harm him. Though the bird is of tender frame and gentle appearance he exhibits great vindictiveness, and fights furiously when contending with other members of his species. In our gardens in winter, to which the birds resort for warmth and protection and greater chances of food, each cock robin reserves a portion for himself, or the whole of it if it be not too large,



PLATE IV: 'It was so well concealed that we should not have found it unless we had seen the bird fly out.' Nest of robin ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

immediately attacking, and, if he be the stronger bird, even killing, a rival. The nest

shown in Plate I was constructed, as mentioned, entirely of dead leaves, but the usual spring and summer nests (Plate IV) are not composed of such material; the birds use dried twigs, roots, moss and grass, the lining being invariably made of hair and feathers, whether the nest be made in winter, spring, or summer. We found this nest in a hole in a bank shaded by thick bushes, and along which a deep ditch ran, a typical place for the robin to build in. It was so well concealed that we should not have found it unless we had seen the bird fly out. Hidden away as it was, and in a very bad light, the photograph does not show well the details of the interior.¹ The first nests of robins are generally built in April, and amongst the earliest. They are never more than three to six feet from the ground. At least two broods, and often three, are reared each year. The male and female birds are much alike, but

¹ I gave this nest twenty minutes exposure at F/32, using a fast plate, and it would have been the better for still longer.

to a practised eye the somewhat smaller size of the female and its more sober hues are at once evident. Only the cock exhibits the very *bright red* breast, and this is most brilliant at nesting time. Any one who has kept sticklebacks in an aquarium will have noticed the similarity of colour between the body of the male fish (especially in the spring at the breeding season) and that of the breast of the robin—indeed he is called the ‘robin stickleback.’ To keep a cock robin in a cage is sheer cruelty, as he will surely die.

CHAPTER II

EARLY SPRING : THE LAST WEEK IN MARCH

WE began our rambles earlier this season, in accordance with our determination of the previous year (*see* Part I, p. 118). So, shortly after Good Friday, Ted and I took a turn with the camera over familiar spots. As we left home we noticed that the rooks were now busy in the elms (which were scarcely yet in bud) ; the bustling sparrows were building in the creepers and gutters, and the starlings amongst the chimneys. We then made our way down to the boat.

The sparrows in my garden have the choice of three situations for their nests, viz. the roofs and gutters of the house, the creepers trained against it, and the trees. The first nests in early spring are built in the gutters or eaves and creepers ; but, when

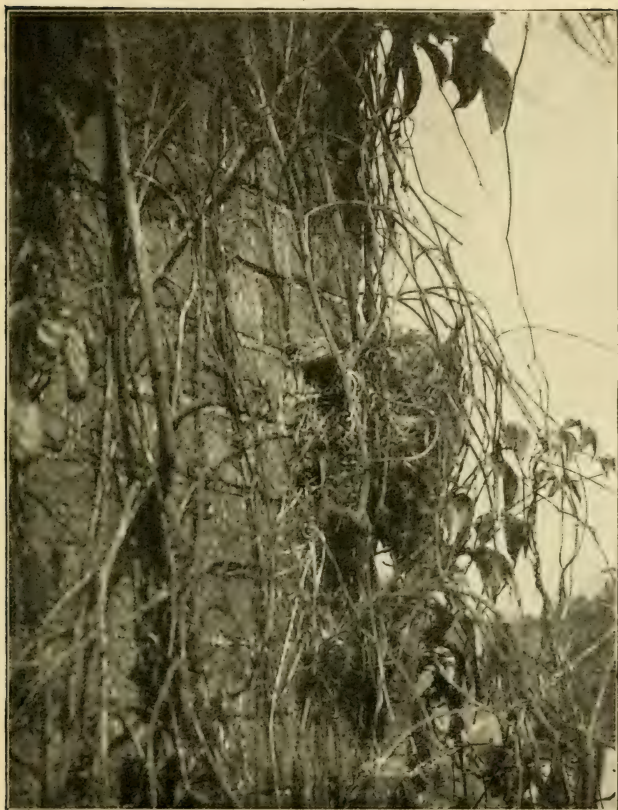


PLATE V: 'The sparrows in my garden have the choice of three situations for their nests, viz. the roofs and gutters of the house, *the creepers trained against it*, and the trees.' ($\frac{1}{8}$ size.)

the trees have put out their leaves, the second and third nests are built in them (*see* Part I, pp. 101-2). This would seem to imply that the so-called house sparrows really prefer to build in trees, but there being no leaves on them in early spring to act as roofs, they resort to sheltered positions. (There is a true tree sparrow, which has been noticed in Part I of this work, p. 129.) One of my sparrows has all the feathers of his back and wings quite white, rendering him very conspicuous; his companions do not seem to mind his unusual appearance. This occurrence of albinism, as it is called, is quite common now-a-days amongst town and perhaps country sparrows. Why?

It is somewhat difficult to obtain even a snapshot of a sparrow, although he is such a common bird. Plate VI shows one that I got of a cock perched on the rim of a water-tub in my garden, whither he had come for a drink. (The exposure was $\frac{1}{16}$ second in full sunshine, with a fast plate, the lens working at $F/16$.) I had placed the camera six feet

away with the half-plate lens focussed on the rim to which I thought he would come, and the plate sheath drawn. I released the

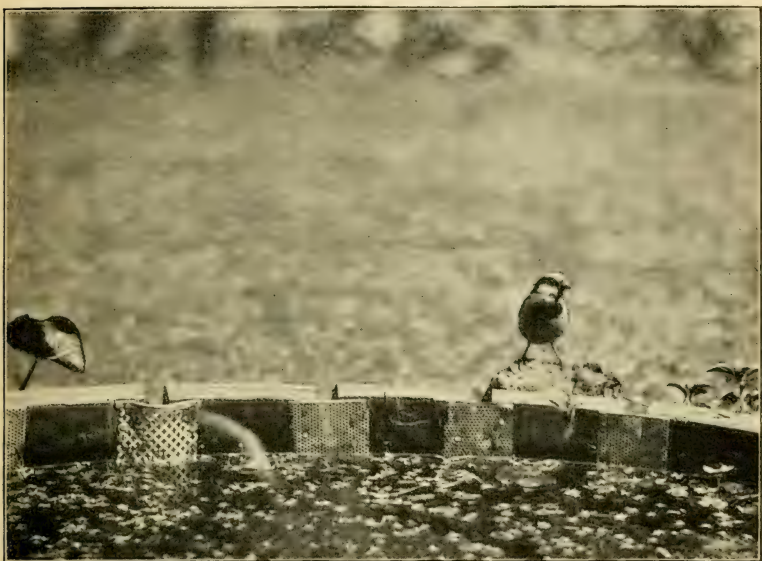


PLATE VI: 'A cock sparrow perched on the rim of a water tub, whither he had come for a drink.'
Enlarged ($\frac{1}{7}$ size).

shutter by blowing sharply through twenty feet of small india-rubber tubing connected with it, having concealed myself behind a wall covered with wistaria. I have since

tried more than once to repeat the picture, but without success ; the birds seem to regard the camera as a trap. In future I must conceal it carefully, in the orthodox way.

* * * *

The islands looked black and bare as we approached them, but experience had taught us not to turn back if the prospects were not of the brightest. For we knew that the islands were full of life, though this was not apparent at first sight. Much of it, however, was still dormant, and not released from the grip of winter. But ' had not the time of the singing of birds come ' ? It was a quiet and somewhat misty morning and the first really warm day of the year. The sudden rise of temperature had drawn up the moisture from the soil, but the sun, all powerful as it is, was not able to dispel the haze. Still the light was good enough for the nature photographs we sought. Scanning the scene before us, we noticed that the trees were leafless, and that the banks had not yet put on their spring coats of green. The only colours

that relieved the sombre shades were the yellow of the coltsfoot almost in bloom (the leaf follows the flower), a touch here and there of golden gorse, and a bright greenish-yellow tinge upon the palm willow, which was as yet only swollen in the bud. The shadows of some tall alders, intensified by the weak sun, were cast at the feet of the trees on the surface of the still water. The dipping of our oars as we passed broke the surface into gentle ripples, which caused what would otherwise have been sharp, silhouetted images to appear like so many huge wriggling serpents. As we approached Swan Island we saw a pair of coot—new birds to us here—swimming lazily about, and we much hoped that we should find their nest if they were on matrimony bent. We were not disappointed, as will be shown further on. Our old friends the carrion crows were not on this island. But we made further acquaintance with these interesting birds later in the season (*see* pp. 68–74). We heard and saw the wood-pigeons of last year

as they carefully searched the trees to decide on the most suitable positions for their nests. And cock robin sang his plaintive song with an accent still reminiscent of the black and cheerless wintry days. The lordly male swan was at his post, guarding, as before, with ruffled wings and ferocious mien, the entrance to his Bridal Path (*see* Part I, pp. 10-18). We ascended this, and again found a high mass of sticks and mud almost in the same spot as the pair had chosen the past year, but not yet shaped or ready for the eggs. These swans afterwards hatched out six cygnets, a fine family. Three of them disappeared mysteriously. Those who saw them concluded that they were killed and eaten by the carrion crows. (It is the marauding and cannibal habits of these birds that spoil their character.) A lonely Full Snipe, disturbed by our approach, flew wildly off, just topping the trees overhead. A solitary Heron high up in the air pursued his slow and lonely course, and a pair of Lapwings flapped lazily along lower down, as

if undecided on their nesting ground (for the eggs were due by now). Our old acquaintances the Moorhens were in full force. It would be difficult to distinguish them from Coot, were it not that the latter are larger, and have 'bald' heads—that is, a white patch on the head in front (*see* p. 127). Of wild ducks there were many Mallards—very wild, as they always are. We were glad to see them, as sportsmen had been busy on these waters; though, of course, some of the birds may have been fresh arrivals. We immediately caught sight of about a hundred other ducks with markedly pure white breasts and sides. They were Tufted Ducks. The tuft from which they get their name is not seen in the photograph (Plate VII). It consists of a few long dark feathers on the back of the head like the Peewit's (*see* Part I, p. 96). Unfortunately, not a single pair of these ducks nested here. We found one of them floating dead on the water. The bird seemed uninjured in any way except upon the neck. It had been seized, we

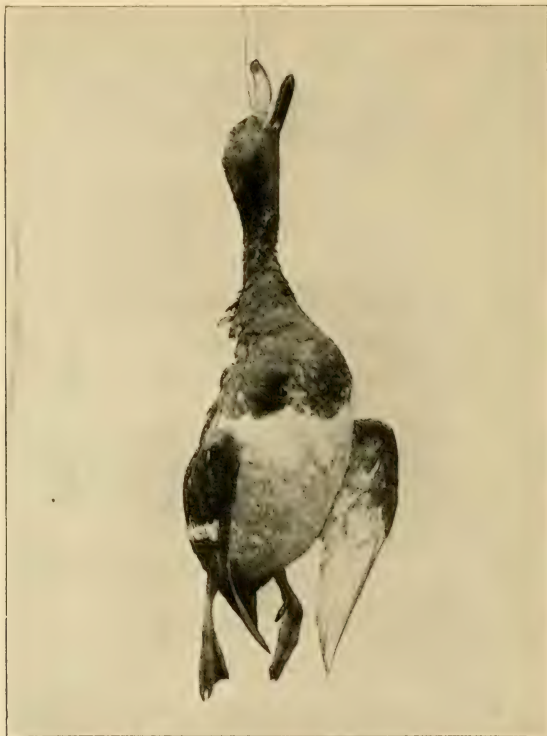


PLATE VII: 'It had been seized, we thought, by a jack whilst diving for food.' Dead Tufted Duck, male ($\frac{1}{8}$ size).

thought, by a jack whilst diving for food, but had escaped being devoured by virtue of its strength and quick movements, and by

disconcerting the fish by violently flapping its wings in its efforts to release itself ; it had ultimately died, choked by the swelling of its neck and throat. The photograph shows the ruffled feathers at the spot where it was injured. Several specimens of both these kinds of ducks kept careering round, doubtless wishing that we were gone. How characteristic is the flight of the duck ! the wings are moved very rapidly, and the direction is always straight, or almost so. Even if many of them are together, this method of flying is maintained, the birds following each other in a long line. This is especially seen in prolonged flights. When suddenly alarmed they rise, of course, in all directions, but join ranks and take up the single line formation as soon as possible. Now and again loud cleavings of the air caused us to turn our eyes to the spot whence the sounds came. They were produced by the male swans flying to and fro, their long necks stretched out to the full, protruding beyond their great bodies and huge wings. From

time to time they would give tongue to their feelings by a loud trumpet-like note. Nesting having just commenced, they were very restless, and guarded their mates very jealously (they do not change every year), or kept off rivals from their accustomed nesting spots. The beautiful flute-like notes of the blackbird were borne across the water now and then. Some wagtails chirped and flitted busily about, with looping flight, as is their manner. A kingfisher darted from the bank as we drew near. He flew quickly away in a straight line, and was not seen again. We saw some recent tunnelling at the foot of an old tree stump, and thought this might have been made by a pair of the birds as the beginning of a nest hole, for they lay their eggs in such places ; but there was nothing further done there.¹ The greenfinch's merry chirps were often heard, and a thrush kept singing in a bush. All these birds had felt the genial influence of the sun, and were showing their joy at the return of

¹ (See Part I, pp. 75-76.)



PLATE VIII: 'A hole in an apple tree—in which a pair of wrynecks nested for several years in succession.' ($\frac{1}{4}$ size.)

the spring in happy melody or quickened movement. And, indeed, the warm atmosphere and the promise of summer all around

put us into good spirits too, and we could not but share their feelings. Of the ordinary migrants, such as the Cuckoo, the cuckoo's mate (the Wryneck ¹), the Sedge- and Reed-Warblers, the Flycatcher, and the like, there were none yet. Nor had the Swallows and House-Martins arrived. But the may was just showing in the green, whilst elders were still more advanced. The points of the sedges, just visible above the water where it was shallow, told that there would soon be waving banks of them there. And so we knew that our little bird visitors would shortly arrive.

We found the remains of several nests plainly visible in some as yet leafless shrubs; they had escaped us when all was in leafy green the previous year. I photographed one of them—that of a Sedge- (or Garden-) Warbler. It was still in very good condition, and shows how cleverly and strongly the little artificers had constructed it, by

¹ The wryneck has been described in Part I. Plate VIII shows a hole in an apple tree in which a pair of wrynecks nested for several years in succession.

weaving the hairs and fibres round the twigs, thus securely fixing the structure so that it defied the months of storm and snow and hail of the past winter.¹

The Sedge-Warbler is not the only small bird that makes long-lasting nests. One often finds those of blackbirds, thrushes, chaffinches and hedge-sparrows that have lasted one or even two winters, though not used by the birds after the first brood. But the strength of *this* little dainty thin nest is remarkable. Its consistency is frail (indeed one can almost see through it), and it has been described as 'loose and slovenly'; but for all that it holds very well together. From observations we have made, and the nests we have found of this bird, we think the sedge-warbler is a very late nester. It may be found building even well into July ;

¹ The nests of sedge- and reed-warblers can always be known by observing if the materials are twisted and woven round the supports. As reeds and sedges have no forks, this is the only method by which the nest can be supported when built amongst them. (See Part I, p. 60.)

these are most probably second nests. If the early part of the summer be wet and



PLATE IX : 'Cleverly and strongly constructed—so as to defy months of storm and snow and hail.' Old nest of sedge-warbler ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

cheerless, some birds (especially pigeons and sparrows) will build even in August. Indeed,

you cannot tell in such seasons what new nests you are going to find until the autumn, when all building operations cease. (The nest of the robin which was found in January, described on p. 4, could not be called a late nest, but an early one.) The Reed-Warbler is, both in plumage and song, very much like the sedge-warbler; he is the same length (five inches); and the nests, too, are almost identical (*see* Part I, p. 60). A difference is found in the eggs, those of the *reed-warbler* having a *greenish white* ground colour, variously marked with olive and grey, whilst the *sedge-warbler's* are of a pale white or *brownish* ground colour, with yellow spots. Each bird lays four or five eggs, but the *reed-warbler's* are somewhat smaller. The *reed-warbler* has no spots in the upper plumage like the *sedge-warbler*, and has a white streak between the eye and the bill. The *sedge-warbler* has a distinct yellowish streak above the eye. The *reed-warbler* frequents and usually builds in reeds and sedges (hence its name); the *sedge-warbler*

may build in reeds (*see* plate XXIV in Part I) but oftener in bushes, and about ten or twelve feet from the ground. Both are generally found near water, but the sedge-warbler will be found the further from it, I think. They are both constant and beautiful warblers. If the nests be approached, instead of uttering a note of alarm like the blackbird or thrush, they sing all the more. Both keep out of sight as much as possible, gliding quickly in and out of the herbage with an easy grace. The sedge-warbler likes to keep at the tops of bushes. The contour of the head, neck and body of these birds resembles the lines of a fine yacht. The nests have to be deep so that the eggs will not drop out, as reeds sway about much in the wind.

* * * *

Then we rowed to Wild Duck Island. Almost at the very spot where we had found a nest last year, a female Mallard (probably the same bird) dashed out; on going to the place we found her nest with nine eggs. It was built *entirely* of dried leaves of a



PLATE X : ' Gliding quickly in and out of the herbage with an easy grace.' Reed-Warbler, hen ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

yellowish-brown colour—those of a Spanish chestnut which grew overhead and formed a very pretty picture. (This is another instance

of how birds often use the material for their nests which is the nearest and easiest found. (Compare the robin's nest, p. 2, and the mallard's nest described on p. 51 of Part I.)

Had we not seen the bird leave the nest we should doubtless have passed it, for we found the eggs almost covered over with leaves. As we looked down on the nest two or three of the uncovered eggs loomed out in the diffused light and caught the eye. Ducks and some other birds are credited with concealing their eggs in this manner, but it is quite possible that in the hurry and excitement of getting off them suddenly, the light leaves are blown on to the eggs by the fluttering of the birds' wings and the scrambling of its legs. It may, however, be presumptuous of me to even hint at doubting what may be a clever instinct given them by the great Creator. The old bird flew many yards away, pitched upon the water, and swam about watching us. I had again the greatest difficulty in getting the camera erected upon the steep slope on which the

nest was built close to the water. Nature photographers will appreciate this difficulty.



PLATE XI: 'Built entirely of dried leaves—those of the Spanish chestnut.' A Mallard's nest ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

Camera legs, on uneven ground especially, are very unmanageable : now one leg is too long,

and then another too short. I find a good plan is to have one of the three legs of the tripod about six inches longer than the other two—and in arranging them to *keep the long one always in front*. After fixing the camera the lens can be turned forwards. But a ball and socket head on which to mount the camera is very convenient (in fact, indispensable) for field work. Not only can the camera be rotated at will, but it can be tilted upwards or downwards or in any direction.

Near by were the remains of a feast made by some creature that certainly could dive, for scattered about were many mussel shells—some quite fresh and with their hinges intact. Now, mussels live in mud and in rather deep water. Carrion crows are known to feed greedily on them, but they are not diving birds. So we concluded that ducks, or perhaps the long-billed herons, were the fishermen. Perhaps, too, the artful carrion crows let the other birds do the diving, whilst they did some of the feasting! Here a bleached head that carried a strong sharp

beak, a whitened breast, and some wing bones were all that remained of one of the robbers just mentioned. We wondered how and why this bird had come by its end. It must have been shot, we thought—for it is as rare a thing to find a dead crow as it is to find a dead donkey. A little further on a flutter and a short croak (like a moorhen's, but pitched in a higher key and uttered more sharply), denoted a Coot. Searching the spot, the bird meanwhile invisible, we found two nests, half built, hanging in a may bush over the water. We watched them subsequently, but they were never completed. They were, however, moorhens' nests. Moorhens have a habit of building nests partially without completing them. I think, also, that they use their nests for roosting purposes after nesting time is over. In the month of August I found several all in good order, close to the water's edge, a few feet from each other. The interiors looked as if the birds sat in them—and it was then long past their nesting time. Again, in another

place I found some in the same month in perfect condition, and they seemed to have been recently built.

Leaving the islands with the hope of soon revisiting them when nesting time was more advanced, we peered quietly over a bank into the water on the other side, towards Pochard Island. There, we saw three pairs of large grey birds with dark-coloured heads, which looked almost the size of geese ; they were swimming quietly about under the lee of the island. They were too far off for us to see them well, but rightly or wrongly we took them to be Great Crested Grebe. Later in the season I had the opportunity of watching a fine specimen of one of these birds here. I could not get within eighty yards without alarming him, but even without a glass I plainly saw his long sharp beak, his brown crest, and ruff, and piercing eye, and admired his fine power of diving and swimming whilst he fed.

Closer in some little expert swimmers and divers were taking their meal, which consisted

of either small fish or the bottom weeds. Judging by their small size and general appearance we decided that these were Lesser Grebe or Dabchicks. We were told that these birds had bred in these waters in former years, but we have not yet found their nest. Indeed they did not stay this year, nor did the Great Grebe either, unfortunately. Several pairs of the white-breasted Tufted Ducks frequented these parts, too. Beyond Pochard Island lay Carrion Crow Island—black and uninviting. Two or three of the birds after which we had named it were perched on the tops of its few trees, showing that they were still in possession of the place ; they seemed to be nesting. We took careful note of this and profited by our observations later on.

We had seen many birds this day, but were too early to find nests. We rowed back to where the boat was generally moored. What strange contrasts to eye and ear presented themselves at this evening hour. There, behind the million-peopled city hung

the great sun. It was low down in the heavens now, a dazzling ball of rich purple orange hue, with a blush of crimson-cerise, a tinge which it shows through the mist and smoke of a city when the atmosphere is humid and still, as it now was. Sharply outlined in the foreground were many house tops on the hill, varied here and there by a tall chimney slowly belching out its smoke, or the sharply-pointed spire of a church. Close by in the stillness of the wooded islands, as the boat glided noiselessly by, many birds were voicing their evening chirps or songs. Not far away the rumble of the trains, the hissing of their steam, and the frequent hoot of bicycles and motor-cars told of the busy human crowd that came and went. Suddenly, borne upon the breeze came loud hurrahs from a thousand young human throats. This indicated a goal scored at some sternly contested football match, the winning goal of the day, it seemed, so prolonged were the cheers. Yet all here was quiet and serene, the falling night slowly hushing bird and

most insect life to sleep. Even some isolated Whirligig Beetles, not yet gathered together in their families (*see* Part I, p. 48) that had ventured out into deep water as the evening was so calm, had ceased their gambols for the day. They scurried to the bank as the advancing boat disturbed them, each leaving a little trail behind, but as we gained upon them they disappeared mysteriously by diving suddenly, and left us wondering what had become of them. Some swans were still busy with their evening meal, cropping short grass from the shore as they paddled leisurely by. A hungry bat which had, perhaps, just left his winter quarters this fine evening for the first time this season, was very busy, and seemingly in a great hurry, catching insects all the time. Bats feed by night, but this one was already on the wing, though the sun had not yet set ; his long fast had doubtless made him very eager for his food. And these sights served to whet *our* appetites, too, as we left the spot.

CHAPTER III

FIRST WEEK IN APRIL

HAD I been in the country instead of only some ten miles from St. Paul's Cathedral, I should doubtless have been able to record much more of wild bird life during an outing that we took in the first week of April, than I have here set down. But this great city of London and its environs is a wonderful place for diversity of life. My attention was attracted in the morning by an unusually loud '*peel, peel, peel, peel,*' or '*quee, quee, quee, quee*' (it is impossible to correctly spell birds' notes) repeated often and with an interval of only a few seconds between the bars, coming from some elms. Going up to them I stood and watched carefully for many minutes in order to discover what bird, for bird it surely was, which produced the

sounds. The Wryneck (the cuckoo's mate) was the musician, calling, I suppose, to attract a hen to himself and propose connubial attachment to her for the season. So closely did he keep to the bark that I only once caught sight of him and his curiously marked plumage (*see* Part I, p. 32). At last he flew off to a meadow, and I saw him no more. I thought of the great journey that this one immigrant among many thousands of his own and other species must have made, and how assiduously (though perhaps he had only been a few hours in this country) he was carrying out the part that Nature had assigned to him. Our little feathered friends mysteriously reach our shores year by year as spring comes round. Unheard, unnoticed by any of us as we lie asleep (except perhaps now and then by the lighthouse keeper on the coast), one by one or in flocks, they make the journey across sea and land. Some come with feeble looping flight, like the Long-tailed Tits, others on unhesitating wing, as the Swallows

and the Swifts. And what a wonderful instinct nature has given them—to strike, in the first place, the opposite shore at night, in storm, perhaps, or chilly fog, and then to find the same county, district, field, and at last the very twig on which they perched the year before !

Ted and I got down to the enticing water once again. The day was dull and the prospects bad, but the camera and kit did not feel heavy for all that. The elders were now much more advanced in leaf, changing the aspect to a pleasant green. The carrion crows were busy at three nests. The birds themselves, however, were nowhere to be seen : they always disappear when human beings visit them. Getting quietly through the thick bushes into a clearing in the middle of the isle, I heard some sounds well known to me even as a boy—the ‘*kchee-a, kchee-a,*’ or ‘*cheek-a, cheek-a,*’ of a disturbed male Full Snipe. We saw the bird and his mate fly off. To our delight we found their nest, or rather the beginnings of it, upon the

ground, laid out in the grass amongst young nettle shoots. But there were no eggs! 'That will keep,' we said almost in unison. It was the first occasion on which I had seen a snipe's nest, though I had shot scores of the birds in winter time in years gone by.

The grebe had gone, but there were many tufted ducks. As we surprised them in our boat round a bend of the island, we observed their characteristic rapid flight, and noticed how some made sudden dives, and took long swims under water, as they hurried away from us. We remembered the Tern and the Sanderlings of last year, but they were not in evidence. And now it began to blow and rain (oh! this fickle climate of ours) and a woful picture we two made, rowing homewards in the teeth of the storm, getting more and more soaked each minute as we braved it out, my chief aim being to keep the camera and plates from getting wet. We had been able to see the female swan sitting on her eggs, and had found another mallard's

nest, with thirteen eggs and well lined with down; also a blackbird's nest ready for the clutch. We noticed that the pigeons were very busy, and had partly built their nests. We had marked a Tree Pipit, and heard him uttering his '*tsec, tsee, tsee, tsit*' each time he reached a new perch. And the chirruping chaffinches were here and there, they too having arrived upon the scene. But there was no cuckoo yet—that harbinger of spring—though Ted had heard and seen one the week before, on March 25, in Kent. He had actually also seen and heard a nightingale the same day in that locality. These were very early arrivals.

This had been a day without a single photograph, but of much interest to us nevertheless. I took good care on reaching home to thoroughly dry the camera and slides.

CHAPTER IV

MID-APRIL

WHEN the day one has set apart and looked forward to as the only available one in the week for an excursion proves to be fine, it is a matter for much self-congratulation in England. So, as I look back upon the few hours of bright sunshine and dark cloud (but without rain or wind—a typical April day) that we spent amongst the birds, I think we were very fortunate. Only a little while before we had experienced strong gales with rain and snow and sleet, instead of the proverbial warm ‘April showers that bring sunny hours.’

How marvellously does spring change her garb after only a few hours of sunshine. The appearance of the islands was very different from that of even a week ago. The

leaf-buds of the may had burst and together with the abundant greenery of the elders caused the islands to present a very pleasing tender shade of colour. The foliage was not yet dense enough to obstruct the view (Plate XII). Willow catkins were partly out ; and the delicate leaves of young oak were visible, whilst the tassels were just about to show. The gorse was much more golden, and sycamores, privets and blackberries were all opening into leaf. Young nettles with their roughly cut leaves of soft yellow green had sprung well up out of the grass. The quick-growing cow parsley had shot up quite a foot, and many plants of the gipsy wort (which has *very* jagged leaves), flooded by the now high water, stood out clearly. The hop vines had pushed up quite a foot ; docks of various kinds were showing, and from a stray flowering currant was wafted that delicious aromatic scent that speaks to us of the country, and of the English country garden in spring time. The sun had drawn it out : ‘Spring is here,

spring is here,' all nature seemed to sing—the plants, the birds, the insects all heralded it. It was now the growing time for most



PLATE XII: 'How marvellously does spring change her garb after only a few hours of sunshine.'

plant life, but some of the earliest flowering species had already bloomed. (Have you ever in March caught the subtle odour of the daphne, the earliest of our indigenous bushes

to burst its bud ? It bears pretty red berries in the autumn time.) Here were whole banks of the coltsfoot ; some of the flower-heads were still sharply bent downwards, but in a few days and with more sunshine, they would be erect, showing their pretty yellow heads. These again, after a few hours, would turn to flat round discs of seed, each seed having a little brush to catch the breezes and be borne away to grow elsewhere, or to be picked up, perhaps, by a goldfinch, which loves it for the lining of its nest. And then follow the leaves of pleasant bluish-green, like a colt's foot in shape. I turned one over—it was white underneath !

How pretty the dead-nettles are ! The pale cream blossoms nestling amongst the serrated leaves are borne upon upright stems. I examined a plant, and thus happened upon a clouded-yellow butterfly sheltering there. I picked it up and tried several times to make it fly, but each time it at once sought the shelter of the foliage. The frail little creature was waiting for warmer

weather before it ventured to rise from the ground upon the wing. It must have wintered in some sheltered nook, and its little muscles were still semi-paralysed from cold.

The ample verdure which nature supplies hides, protects and shades the homes made by birds. But scarcely a leaf is disturbed by the careful architects to betray the fact that much busy work has been done by them. But now the nests that are there are easy to find, because there are so few leaves. Yet each one has to be examined by the bird-nester to see if it be old or new. To the experienced eye the difference is seen at a glance ; if the material has a dull and soiled look, even though the nest be sound, it is a last year's one. But if the bents of grass are yellow, and the odds and ends of string and cloth are bright, or the hair, the feathers and fibres appear glossy, then they have been placed there only the other day, they are not weather-beaten, and the nest is fresh. Look into it ; perhaps the eggs are there. If not, come that way again

in a week or so, and you will doubtless be rewarded by a pleasant sight. But be careful not to disturb the twigs, nor even the leaves near by, lest the birds forsake the nest and build elsewhere, somewhere that may not be easy to find. And specially avoid putting your fingers into the nest to feel the eggs—your touch will be very perceptible to the keen senses of the birds.

We went to Pochard Island, hoping to find fresh developments. On the way we started a solitary Wheatear. We knew him at once by his size and colour; he is not unlike a sparrow or a lark, but the flight is not the same, and the tail shows white from behind. No grebe, no tufted duck and no coot this time, but in their place two geese swimming about in stately style. As we rowed up one of them (evidently the male by its larger size, pronounced plumage and troubled behaviour) flew a hundred yards away at once. The female, however, could not get off the water or would speedily have joined her mate; she had difficulty in even swim-

ming. We were able to get quite close to her; whereupon the male, seeing his con-

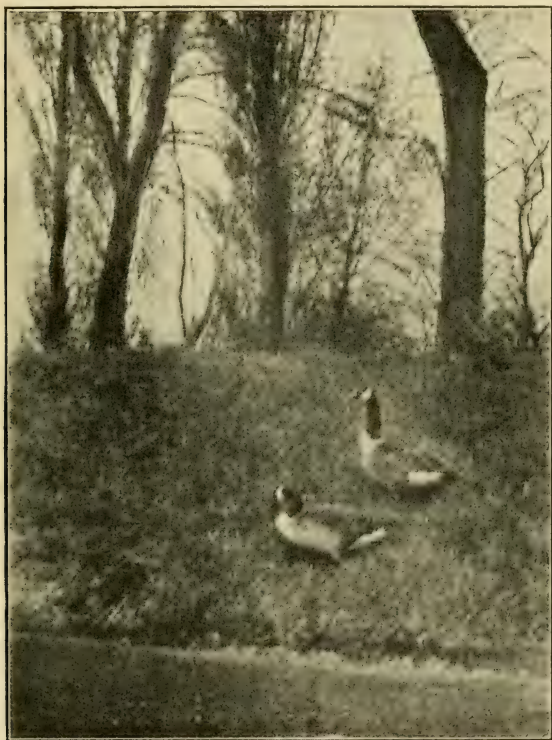


PLATE XIII: A pair of Canada geese. Enlarged from a snapshot. ($\frac{1}{40}$ size.)

sort in danger, forgot his own safety and flew up in fevered haste to protect her. They

waddled up the bank in company in order to get away from us in the boat, for we rowed quicker than they could swim. I snapshotted them (Plate XIII). We could never make out how the female had become disabled ; she may have been ill, or heavy in the egg, or injured, and perhaps had been shot at. At any rate she was afterwards found dead. On submitting the photograph to a well-known authority, I was informed that the birds were Canada Geese (*Anas canadensis*). It is very improbable that they had flown to this country of their own accord, so they were doubtless imported birds and visiting here from some private waters. The owner must be mourning the loss of them, or that of the hen at all events ; perhaps the male got back to his old home. The white collar just under their heads was a very marked feature of their long black necks. The bodies were dark, the breasts and underpart of the body behind grey, and the backs brown, whilst the tail and pinions were black.



PLATE XIV: Nest of full snipe, built amongst young nettles. ($\frac{1}{3}$ size.)

A small shingly beach is the only landing place on Pochard Island when the water is high, as it was this day. This was always

occupied by a pair of full snipe, which flew off as we approached in their typically erratic way ; it is this flight which makes them so hard to shoot ; the male bird was ' *kchee, kchee* ' -ing as usual. Not only is this note very characteristic of full snipe, but the crescented wings once seen are easily recognized. We could not find the nest of this pair, though we felt sure they had one, like the couple we found the week before upon the cleared patch. I was able to photograph the nest of the latter—this time with four olive-brown speckled eggs. They struck us at once as being very large for the size of the bird. It was a rounded hollow in the ground, about three inches across and the same in depth, with a lining of moss. The nettles round it grew up in a week or two and quite concealed it. In Guernsey I had often as a lad (gun in hand and with a dog) scoured likely spots for snipe, and considered myself fortunate if I found even one after a long tramp of many miles. To come upon a nest almost within ear-shot of Bow

bells seemed wonderful indeed. The birds, unfortunately, forsook this nest and left the place altogether ; nor did the other pair remain. I expect we scared them away.

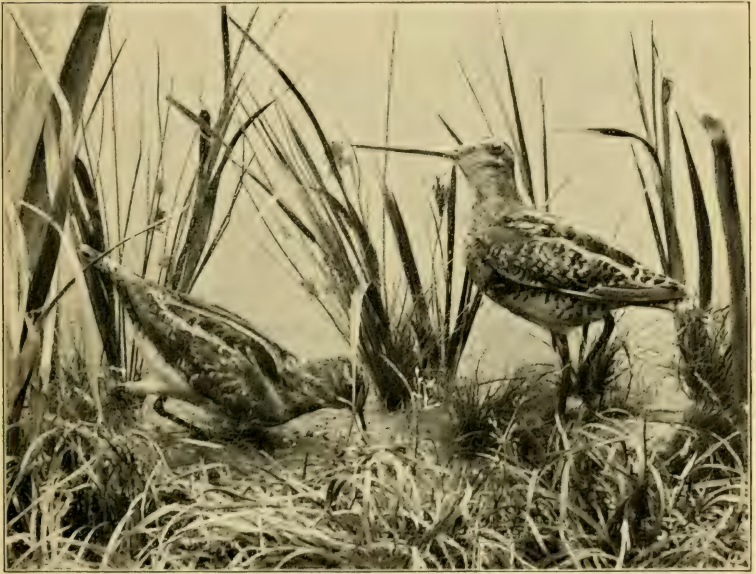


PLATE XV : A Pair of full snipe feeding. ($\frac{1}{3}$ size.)

The Full Snipe must be distinguished from the Jack Snipe. The jack is not the male of the full, as many think ; the two are distinct species. The jack is only a winter

visitor with us, arriving in September or October, and leaving again in spring for breeding in the north of Europe. To about every ten of the larger birds only one of the smaller is generally found by sportsmen, hence the full snipe is known as the 'common' snipe. This title also distinguishes him from the 'double,' 'great' or 'solitary' snipe, which is a similarly marked but larger bird and a rare visitor. There is also the 'summer snipe,' a name applied to the common sandpiper of the sea-shore, streams, and inland waters, which resembles the full and the jack. The jack is quite a third smaller than the full. He flies like him, but is even more erratic, and for all these reasons he is more difficult to shoot. He makes no sound on rising. The full snipe is wary, and unless he has not been hunted or the bird half frozen with cold, he will generally rise on your approach before even your dog can get to him. But the jack lies close, and sometimes lets you even walk over him. Then again, the full snipe, if much scared, will take a long

flight, often of many miles, disappearing to a speck in the sky. It needs good eyesight to mark the bird for perhaps a quarter of an hour as he flies round, but it is wise to do this if possible, for he will often come back to almost the spot from which he rose. If not too much alarmed he will pitch again about a hundred yards ahead. The jack never seems to get very frightened, even though you may hunt him closely after having fired at and missed him several times ! He will only fly a short distance ahead and pitch again. Both species alight on the ground very quickly and in a slanting direction. It is very difficult to see either kind sitting ; their markings blend with almost any soil or grass, and they can squat in a slight hollow so as to be quite out of sight.¹ The full snipe stands seven to eight inches high. Both species have long legs and long soft beaks adapted for the marshy ground

¹ A Cockney who thought himself a great sportsman told me he had been out shooting and had seen lots of snipe sitting on trees ! They cannot perch !

where they live, the food being taken by suction in mud. It is a pathetic sight to see snipe sitting on the ice of a frozen pond ;



PLATE XVI: A jack snipe, male. ($\frac{1}{3}$ size.)

the ground everywhere is hard, and they cannot use their soft bills for their daily food. They become mere skeletons if the [frost is prolonged and the wind adverse for migration.

The plumage of both species is much alike, though the feathers of the jack have the brighter hues. The back and wings are barred and mottled grey, brown, and black, with a touch of yellow here and there, the under part of the body being whitish. Their whole appearance is like that of the Woodcock, which bird is, however, quite four times larger and chiefly a rich brown in colour. The eye in all these birds is a beautiful and marked feature, set high and well back in their rounded heads. The snipe have rich markings of yellowish-brown over the eyes, and stripes of the same colour are found on the back of the body. Many full snipe remain in the British Isles all the year round and breed, and these are generally found always in the same spot, but by far the greater number are emigrants from Scandinavia and come to us for the winter, driven south by cold. Besides the sounds the male utters on the wing when disturbed, as before mentioned, he makes a noise during the breeding season often called a '*drum-*

ming ' ; to some ears it resembles the distant bleating of a lamb, and gives the bird the name of ' moor lamb ' in some places. No one knows exactly how it is produced, but the bird drops swiftly downwards towards his mate with the wings partly expanded, and it is then the noise is made.

Snipe are much sought after by sportsmen. It is no little achievement to shoot one on the wing, especially a jack. It is because of this that a white feather taken from the tip of the wing is placed in the front of the hat-band, one, or sometimes the pair, to represent each bird that has fallen to the gun of the proud owner. Snipe on toast is an epicure's morsel ; they are not usually drawn before cooking. Great numbers of full snipe and sometimes many jack are found close to London on sewage farms. I have seen as many as fifty in an hour's walk in the autumn and winter. It is especially during a drought in early autumn that these birds congregate in these constantly wet spots. At dusk they will fly into the best bits from the surrounding



PLATE XVII : ' Nest of a ringdove, built only breast high.' ($\frac{1}{7}$ size.)

country to feed there during the night. They will fly alone if they have been much shot at, but more often in 'whisps' of three,

or five, or more together—generally, curiously enough, in odd numbers.

Whilst I was taking the photo of the snipe's nest Ted was searching around and came upon that of a Ringdove, built only breast high in some still leafless bushes. This was a most unusual elevation for a pigeon's nest, and permitted of a very good photograph. Built, as it was, not upon the thick limb of a tree (which position pigeons like) but supported only by thin branches, it looked very prominent. It contained two pure white eggs (the usual number), which caught the eye at once as they lay exposed to view in the characteristic carelessly built nest, made of dead sticks, almost flat and without any lining. Some days after this the hen let me have a look at her through the bushes without leaving the nest; the eggs were then nearly hatched, which accounted for her conduct. She sat so quietly that I tried a long exposure, working the lens at $F/32$, using this small stop, as photographers will know, to get as sharp an

image as possible of the foreground and background as well as of the nest. I knew the subject would require at least three minutes exposure at this aperture, since



PLATE XVIII: Ringdove or woodpigeon. Male
($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

there were thick trees overhead. She actually allowed me to expose twice for this period of time without moving a feather. I am sorry to say, however, that the picture showed

no contrast ; this was due to the many surrounding twigs, illustrating once again what I have stated in the preface of Part I of this work.

Here let me briefly state how the wild British pigeons may be distinguished. There are two species much like each other (1) the Ringdove or Woodpigeon, called in some parts the 'Cushat,' in others the 'Queest,' etc., and (2) the Stockdove. (The term dove is applied to several kinds of pigeons.) Both are rather larger than a good-sized tame pigeon (say a Homer or a Carrier), and are about fourteen inches long, the ringdove being larger than the stockdove. The colour that strikes the eye in the ringdove when seen from afar is a light bluish chestnut brown, and white feathers edging the wings are noticeable during flight, and are distinctive. The stockdove is of a *general blue* tint with a purplish-red chest, *whilst the beak and legs are carmine*. When close, the ring on the base of the neck of the ringdove is quite distinct, although not a very even mark

nor complete. Some of the feathers here are iridescent. The males of both species coo to their mates, especially at morning, and at evening as they come to roost together (they are mated for life), and these love notes are accentuated at the breeding season. The ' *coo-coo-coo-oo-oo* ' of the ringdove has been likened to a human being talking, and not without reason. Sometimes the first coo is much emphasized, then the second is uttered in an explosive manner. These variations seem to imply at times vehement scolding or entreaty, at others intense affection. Some people like the notes, others find them mournful. The ringdove (woodpigeon) chooses trees or high bushes to build in, whilst the stockdove prefers holes in trees, in pollard tops, etc., and is sometimes found in the neighbourhood of the sea, where he will, perhaps, nest low in a rabbit burrow. The ringdove is much the commoner bird near London.

Another pigeon found in the neighbourhood of great towns (as well as in the country generally) is the Turtledove. It is quite a

third smaller than either of the former birds, and usually few are to be seen, because they are much scarcer and keep themselves concealed, especially at nesting time. The wing feathers are brown and black, and the feathers of the tail are barred at the end with black and show white when the tail is expanded in flight. It, too, has iridescent feathers on the neck. Its note is a distinct '*tur, tur*': hence its name. It is migratory, and never remains with us in winter. It is often kept in confinement. Tame pigeons, in their endless varieties, have been bred through many generations from the Rock Dove, a small blue pigeon found near the sea, where it inhabits caves and holes. The love that domestic pigeons have for a lump of rock salt to peck at is traceable to this fact. As has been before noticed, the eggs of birds that lay in dark holes and nests are in most cases white. But the familiar wild pigeons' nests are never in the dark, so we must conclude, I suppose, that their remote ancestors were of the sea type, and that in

time they will learn to lay variously coloured eggs, so as to 'harmonize with their environment,' as Darwin puts it, and be thus the better concealed. The Turtledove's nest is like



PLATE XIX: Stockdove. Male ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

that of the two preceding species, carelessly built of twigs, and flat, and it also lays two pure white but smaller eggs. Wild pigeons generally raise two broods each season, but

if the weather keep fine and warm they may go on nesting right up to autumn. They assemble in great flocks in the winter, their numbers being largely increased by arrivals from the continent. They devour seed crops of all kinds, and do not spare turnip tops. They probably never eat insects or flesh. They love corn but especially peas and beans. When on the ground the gait is peculiar, the bird advancing with a nodding movement of the head. The flesh is delicious, but tough. It is wise to eat pigeons as young as possible, and whilst in what is known as the 'squeaker' or 'squab' age. The feathers and skin are very shot resisting, and the birds remarkably tenacious of life. The flight is strong and rapid. The sportsman rarely comes on the birds in the winter near enough to shoot them, as they are peculiarly wary and difficult to stalk. They are generally waited for in the evening, the gunner being well concealed, as they fly to their roosting places. Sometimes shelters are built in the tops of high trees, in which the sportsmen wait in ambush for them.

We noticed a Chiff-chaff busy amongst the bush tops, and hoped it would build in



PLATE XX : Turtledove. Male ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

this birds' paradise. Near by a Yellow-hammer chirruped his drawn-out notes,

which country people say sounds like, '*bit o' bread and no chee—ee—ee—se.*' A few yards away on the ground was a fresh swan's nest, ready for the eggs. It was built at the top of a pathway made by the birds beneath the greenery, similar to the one on Swan Island that we found last year (*see* Part I, p. 15). Close to it lay an old unbroken egg that had been dropped there or ejected from the nest ; we have before noticed that this is their manner sometimes.

Ted found a Thrush sitting quietly on her eggs, though I had been photographing only a few feet away. On reaching the boat, we again flushed the full snipe on the beach, and then rowed away to Carrion Crow Island. As usual the birds made off as soon as we approached. I saw them sitting watching us disconsolately two hundred yards away, uttering from time to time their slow hoarse caws. I got a photograph of one of the three nests built there (*see* p. 40), with four bluish grey dark spotted eggs—a full clutch ; each egg was about an inch long. The old

birds had, as we had noticed before, made off; but one day Ted, in climbing up to a carrion crow's nest, was fiercely attacked



PLATE XXI: 'A very solid structure—18 inches across—which must have weighed 10 lb. at least.'
Nest of a carrion crow ($\frac{1}{8}$ size).

by the female, and had to defend himself with a stick! This was because the eggs were nearly hatched.

This little colony of three pairs of crows

was uncommon, for they mostly build alone. Seen from below, there was nothing to distinguish their nests from those of rooks in a rookery. The subject of the photograph was built in the thickly branched top of an elder tree, and about twenty-five feet from the ground. This is low for a carrion crow's nest, but elders were the only trees on the island, and it was an isolated place, which they like, so they felt themselves quite safe at this elevation. We had considerable difficulty in getting the camera into position. One has an antipathy towards the carrion crow: the saying is 'give a dog a bad name, and hang him,' so it may be that we object to him because he is black, a colour of evil omen. But there is real cause to dislike him, because of his robbing and cannibal instincts and unclean habits of feeding, useful scavenger though he may be. Other pernicious ways of his have been before noticed. Besides all this he is malicious. Crows have been known to pull a rookery to pieces, and it is because of this that rooks are said to con-

gregate for building, there being safety in numbers. But if the carrion crow's nest be closely examined, one can have nothing but admiration for the cleverness and foresight these birds show. The nest was a massive structure, about eighteen inches high. (This, too, is about the height of a rook's nest, and the eggs of the two birds are much alike.) It was bowl-shaped, eighteen inches across over all. The foundation and framework were of dead branches and twigs of all angles, some were eighteen inches long, and many were heavy and quite half an inch thick, whilst all were dexterously laid, and intercrossed into a firm mass. Inside this was a lining of wet mud and moss two inches thick, forming the bowl of the nest which was eight or nine inches across, and of the same depth. This was lined with stout fresh pieces of the inner bark of a tree, torn into strips about a foot long, and $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch broad. (A glance at their powerful beaks shows that carrion crows have little difficulty in tearing and rending

the bark, as well as the flesh they eat.) Interwoven with these there were lumps of horse hair clippings (obtained we know not where), together with a good deal of short stiff green grass. These formed a substantial lining. Inside of all, at the bottom and sides were odds and ends of soft wool, bits of string and small feathers, to receive the eggs. The whole made a very solid structure and must have weighed ten pounds at least (Plate XXI). It would have required a hurricane to dislodge it from the tree, or even to shake it apart.

Plate XXII shows what a carrion crow's nest looks like in course of construction, and also shows the bird. Substitute a rook for the crow, and it will illustrate the same for that bird. Finding it impossible to get near enough to one of these nests to photograph it large, *as seen from below*, I ventured to build one myself, copying the original as closely as I could. How far I have succeeded I must leave the reader to judge. I used about four hundred sticks in its construction, and found myself able to put together the



PLATE XXII : 'What a carrion crow or rook's nest looks like in course of construction.' Carrion Crow ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

rough foundation, but did not attempt the intricate lining. The rook's nest is not so substantial as the carrion crow's. I have

seen them partially build more than one before deciding on the one for the eggs. (Compare the wren, Part I, pp. 82-5.) Crows evidently provide for eventualities, as they often choose isolated wind-driven spots, though they do not build so high as rooks, and prefer to build against the main trunk of the tree. The young, too, are doubtless very active in their movements and rough with their claws. So altogether the birds make their nests strong and heavy. It is said, and I think rightly, that they use the same nest for two, three, or more seasons in succession, merely doing general repairs and re-lining when egg-laying time comes. And no wonder, as the structure must require a great deal of labour on their part and take a long time to make. (I know it took *me* some time to gather the sticks and arrange them for my *partially built* nest, and I did not have to carry up each one separately to the top of a high tree !)

In this case there was no protection for the nest from above, but when the elder leaves came out they formed a fair roof.



PLATE XXIII: 'A familiar sight within the precincts of a town.' A rookery in April.

Now let me try to answer the often repeated question, 'what is a Crow?' that is to say, a *British* Crow? And indeed this is

not an idle query, for it is a common thing both in towns and in the country to see large birds entirely black flying about, and we call them all 'crows.' In the first place, when you see such a bird the great probability is that it is a rook, for they are very common, and often construct the well-known rookeries, a familiar sight within the precincts of a town.

They build their nests in the topmost forks of the tallest trees, elms if available, because the top branches are conveniently forked and do not obstruct flight. The birds will come down on the grass at nesting time. Their mode of progression should be noted—they *walk*, whereas the carrion crow generally *hops*. The males may sometimes be seen here, feeding the females and the young. Here, too, you can often get a close view of the birds during nesting time; under other circumstances you can rarely get near them. They may be observed flying from place to place in search of food or going to water at all seasons and times, but chiefly



PLATE XXIV: 'The birds, will often come down on the grass or meadows near their nests.' Young rook before it has the white face ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

in the early morning, when they set out for the day to feeding grounds; they do not

fail to spot a newly ploughed field, though it may be some miles away. They return slowly and tired, to roost in the evening, *seldom or never alone*. They may have to contend with a head wind, its direction having changed since they started out in the morning; or a gale may have blown up, in which case their tacking methods are very interesting to watch. But despite all the difficulties which they may encounter, they time their return journey so as to be sure of getting home at, or just before, dark.

The Jackdaw is a smaller bird than the rook, being about fifteen inches long, whilst the rook measures eighteen or more inches from tip of beak to tail. The rook's 'caw' is almost as familiar to us as the cock's crow. It is a single syllable, 'caw' or 'cor' or 'kor.' The carrion crow's note seems often to sound more like 'cora' or 'korah.' The jackdaw gives us a noisy 'clack-clack.' Its movements and flight are more rapid than the rook's or crow's. The nests of jackdaws are generally in holes well out of reach; in walls,

church steeples, or chimney stacks, or in the hollow of a tree, or a cliff. Ruins are a favourite place. There they find that the



PLATE XXV: 'The jackdaw is a smaller bird than the rook.' ($\frac{1}{6}$ size.)

old gutters or joist holes, several feet from the ground, in the face of the bare wall, or the holes out of which stones or bricks have fallen, are most suitable places for the nest.

The eggs are generally five in number, and of a bluish-white or pale greenish colour, speckled (mostly at the larger end) with dark brown or purplish grey. Rooks' eggs are larger (almost an inch long), four or five in number, and of a pale greenish ground colour blotched with darker greenish brown. We have already considered those of carrion crows. These latter birds do not live in communities, though two or three pairs may select the same trees for building (as they did on the island before noticed). A few may occasionally be seen feeding together, and often quarrelling over bits of food ; and these will mostly be hopping about, not walking like the rooks, when on the ground. A solitary crow flying about is most likely a carrion crow. I do not know how to distinguish its flight from that of the rook, nor whether they, or rooks, or jackdaws, pair for life. The jackdaw is capable of being tamed, and even taught to imitate human speech, if taken young. I have seen one which would come from the castle

walls where he lived, to any one who held out his hand, expecting some tit-bit each time. Another will leave mates in the park to

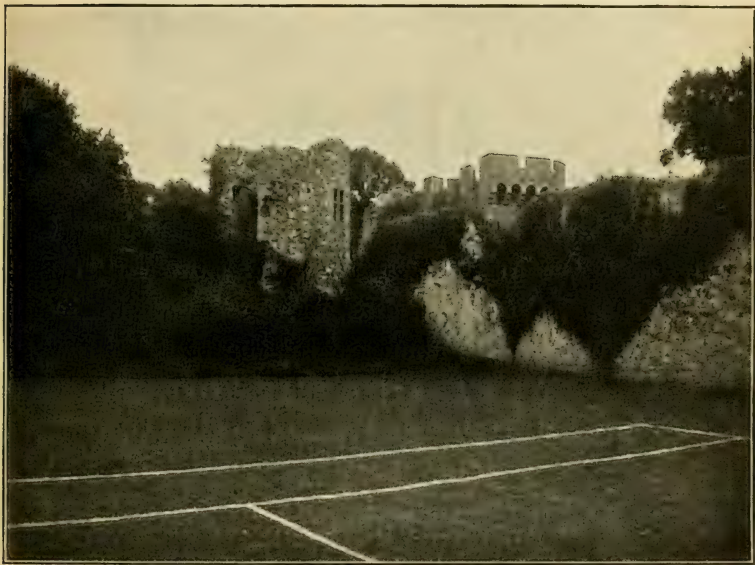


PLATE XXVI: 'The home of the jackdaw—ruins are a favourite place.'

come to his master's window, if called by the name of 'Jock.' Their awkward flopping way when alighting is characteristic, though shared by the rook and crow to a less extent.

And no one could help noticing their keen bright, bluish, almost pure white eyes, as they pose with their head inquisitively on one side when looking at you. If you see the three species we have been considering together stuffed, you could not mistake them. The jackdaw is the smallest. They are all black, but the jackdaw has a greyish-white patch at the back of the neck, which, however, is not seen till after the first moult. Of the other two the carrion crow is somewhat the larger, and has a stronger and more curved beak than the rook. Then again, the rook, *if an adult bird* (that is, after the second moult), will have lost the feathers at the base of the beak, whereas this is never the case with the carrion crow. This leaves the skin here and under the eye bare and bald and of a bluish-grey colour, which has given him the name of the 'White-Faced Crow.' The sexes in these three species are difficult—almost impossible—to distinguish.

The rook's nest is much like the carrion crow's, but is more loosely constructed ;



PLATE XXVII: 'The white-faced crow.' Head of adult rook. (The bluish-white face is apparent in the living bird.) ($\frac{1}{2}$ size.)

still it, also, is so well built that it will last from one year to another. In fact, if you

count the old nests in a rookery when the leaves have fallen and you can see them, and then count them again when the birds are nesting in early spring, before the leaves are out, you will be able to tell if the rookery has been enlarged by fresh nests. Only one brood is reared each year. Rookeries are deserted after the young are able to fly (about the first of May), the birds resorting to meadows and finding other roosting places. Their 'caws,' varying as they do in intonation, seem to imply a language intelligible to each other. I have often tried to fathom it, as perhaps the reader may have done. When feeding in flocks a sentinel rook will always be seen somewhere. Sportsmen say these birds can smell gunpowder before a shot is fired ; of course, *burnt* gunpowder, especially of the old black kind, leaves a well-known smell. Certainly it is only very rarely that they can be approached near enough to be shot at. The young 'squabs' are often eaten ; they should be skinned before being cooked or made into the well-known rook

pie, as this takes away their bitter taste considerably.¹ Sportsmen shoot the young birds with a rifle as they sit outside their nests ; it would obviously be very unsportsmanlike to shoot them with a charge of shot, when there would be but little chance of missing them !

The jackdaw's nest is, like the starling's (*see* Part I, p. 41), a motley mixture of sticks and soft pieces of material and feathers, piled up together in large quantities, sometimes to the height of several feet. It is generally difficult of access. Jackdaws rear a single brood each season. Rooks and jackdaws are clean feeders ; i.e. they do not eat carrion, but will consume fresh meat. Vegetable products, insects, worms, grubs, or soft shellfish are their food. They may sometimes be seen (like starlings) on the backs of sheep, which tolerate their presence there because they free them from parasites. Rooks like

¹ The flesh of starlings also is bitter unless the heads are cut off and the birds allowed to bleed freely, and the skins removed.

grain, but on the whole they are serviceable rather than harmful to the farmer, by destroying pests, though he does not hesitate to shoot them when occasion offers at the season when the corn is ripe, or to hang up their dead bodies as scarecrows.

* * * *

The other large black birds in this country are the Hooded or Grey-Backed Crow, the Raven, and the Chough.¹ These will scarcely concern the town dweller. The grey-backed crows are strong birds like the carrion crows, but are larger, measuring twenty inches in length ; they also are foul feeders. The name is obtained from the dark slate colour of the nape of the neck, back, wings and under surface of the body. The beak is very strong, shiny black, and is moustachioed with short stiff black projecting feathers. The legs, toes and claws are also very powerful and shining black. If you saw one, even at a distance, you would at once be attracted

¹ Pronounced Chuff.

by its size and uncommon appearance. The Raven is the largest of *our* crows. He is very rare now, and found only in far-off and isolated districts. Few have seen him, or even heard the raucous cry of this lonely, long-lived bird. The chough is not, strictly speaking, a crow. He is somewhat smaller than the jackdaw. His long and arched neck, red beak, legs and claws distinguish him at once. He is found chiefly near the sea and on the banks of tidal rivers. The bird is not generally migratory, though I have seen some of them appear in Guernsey in the winter (they may have come from France). I can say from personal experience that their flesh is not appetizing.

Many legends exist with regard to crows. A black bird of the crow kind is thought by the superstitious to be a bird of evil omen, and to possess in some way or other satanic power—because he is black! It is of the raven, however, that most has been thought and written, but I have no doubt he is quite guiltless of all that is ascribed to him.

Crows generally possess much intelligence and look wise birds. They have keen eyesight, and their senses of smell and hearing are highly developed. The possession of these faculties naturally makes them very wary and apprehensive of danger, and therefore cute, which may be taken in a good or a bad sense according to the education of the observer.

* * * *

It was getting late, so we packed up. On the way home Ted spotted a fresh, neatly moulded nest in the lower branches of an alder ; it was probably a Chaffinch's judging by its regular round shape, but without eggs. Lastly, in looking round a thick patch of blackberry near the water, we heard a scrambling in the middle of it, and presently out flew a mallard. After much search we found the nest, it was in the very thick of the brambles and approachable only with difficulty because of the thorns : it had ten eggs. (This nest entirely disappeared a few days later—doubtless the carrion crow's

work again.) As we left the water a Kestrel came sailing along. When it reached some tall trees, large flocks of woodpigeons and starlings flew quickly out of the tops. They had taken up their roost there comfortably for the night, but the kestrel (and other hawks) are well-known and feared by their kin of more tender beak and claw.

CHAPTER V

AN OFF DAY—END OF APRIL

IT is very remarkable to notice the effect that a few days of cold weather, following upon mild, will have on the nesting of birds. Last week all nature had taken a new lease of life. Herbage was advancing by leaps and bounds and many wild birds were in evidence, and could be heard too. But to-day, as we set out on another jaunt, the wind blew from the north-east, and had been in that quarter for forty-eight hours. There was a bite in it, although the sun was fairly bright, once more emphasizing the old English saying, 'cast not the clout till May is out.'

Landing on Moorhen Island, we at once noticed the absence of bird life. Several tufted ducks were swimming about. The mallards had already made their nests. We

found three of them on the island. The birds were sitting very close, which meant that the eggs were almost hatched. (Sometimes when incubation is nearly completed the female duck will let you lift her off the nest if you wish to see her eggs, rather than move, though she is the wariest of birds at other times.) But of the smaller birds there were scarcely any to be seen. A stray chaffinch, a couple of full snipe which we put up, and one lonely swallow flitting along the water (the first we had seen this season), were all we could find. We were even glad enough to *hear* the pretty quick ‘*tee-tee-tee-tee-tee-tee*’ of the hedge-sparrow. The tender little migrants were in shelter somewhere or other, and were voiceless. Some had not yet arrived. But we knew that when the weather became warmer, and the trees and bushes afforded more protection, and insects came out from their hiding places, or fresh batches were hatched out dancing to the sun’s bright rays, then the birds would all be there and sally forth and sing their little songs again, and

get on with their nesting. We had already found six mallards' nests this season. Reckoning an average of at least twelve eggs to each meant that over seventy ducklings should soon be paddling about these waters. Seventy young to twelve old birds seems a good rate of increase ; but how many of these youngsters would survive ? (We only subsequently saw *one* complete brood swimming about.) Their chief enemies are pike, rats, hawks and our old friends the carrion crows, and many perish in other unnatural ways, too.

Besides the mallard's nests we only found a thrush's with three eggs, and a moorhen's without eggs on Moorhen Island, though we searched closely. One of the duck's nests formed a very pretty picture. It was on the ground, as usual : in the centre were twelve of the greenish eggs with some down round them, lying in a broad ring of light brown leaves of which the nest was made, the whole being framed with, and hidden by, the delicate fern-like foliage of young fool's parsley, of which there were quantities here.

Were this very common plant introduced from some foreign country and nursed in a hot-house, it would be very highly prized. We are not half alive to the beauties that surround us, often seeking to find them elsewhere, rather than to open our eyes and appreciate what we have at our feet in this beautiful island of ours.

The other ducks' nests were cunningly concealed under brambles, and thus protected from molestation. The birds flew off as we almost trod on them. We also flushed a Landrail (or Corncrake, as it is sometimes called, from its loud 'crake, crake' notes, and its love of running in the corn), a sleek narrow-shaped light-brown bird about ten inches long. This uncommon bird, somewhat resembling a partridge, slipped away at once into the undergrowth, from which it would have required a very good dog to dislodge it.

The old female swan was sitting in her renewed nest in her beautiful sanctum, just as she had sat last year (*see* Part I, p. 15). The male was nowhere to be seen. It was

pathetic to see her sitting there alone and unprotected, patiently doing her duty through the many weary days of incubation, impelled by the instinct that taught her to look for the family that was to be, and the joy that it would bring to her. This great bird could have given a good account of herself if interfered with. The male, however, as we have before observed, would gallantly do his part, too; and would not forsake her or the cygnets till they could (in three or four months' time) take care of themselves. We did not know where he was, so we kept a sharp look-out lest he should be dozing in the 'Bridal Path' (see Part I, p. 12) and make a sudden onslaught on our calves.

Each day that we landed on this island a cock blackbird would invariably frisk into the bushes with a loud impetuous '*tee, tee, tee, tee, tee,*' uttered as he flew. This the bird often does when disturbed. We caught sight of him, with his brilliant black coat and bright yellow beak. We thought that his behaviour suggested a nest, as it was the

right time of the year for it. But we searched several times without success. I ultimately discovered it, but not on the island. It was

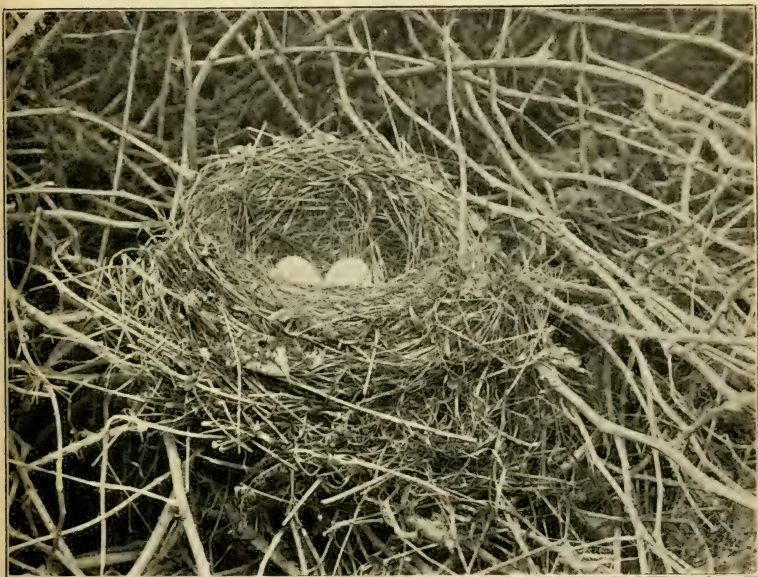


PLATE XXVIII: 'No clay coats the interior, as in the case of the thrush.' Nest of blackbird ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

on the mainland, a hundred yards away, and built very compactly as usual, and well-concealed amongst dense blackberry canes. The bird makes use of twigs and fibres,

coated with mud and clay. These dry together firmly. But no clay lines the interior, as in the case of the thrush (*see* Part I, p. 17); the inside is lined with fine grasses and roots. The clay lining at once distinguishes the two nests, which are otherwise very similar when seen from below. A common nesting-place for the blackbird is a thick hedge, and an evergreen is also a favourite spot. Four or five eggs are laid; they are of a light greenish-blue ground colour, freely spotted with pale brown. The nest which we found contained four eggs. Even more than three broods may be raised each year. Were we to regard the notes of this wily bird as a triumphant screech of scorn, at the foolish human beings who were deceived into thinking that its nest was close by? or do they, as a rule, mean a marked protest, or an exclamation of vexation at being intruded upon? I found another nest similar in every respect to this one close by, but without any eggs; nor did I see another pair of birds there. This may show that blackbirds, like some



PLATE XXIX: 'We caught sight of him with his brilliant black coat and bright yellow beak.' Blackbird, cock ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

other birds, wrens for instance, build two nests, or perhaps more, before deciding on the one for the eggs. If a human being,

a hawk, cat or other intruder approach the nest, the cock utters a series of loud notes similar to those we had heard, and whilst on the wing, having flown rapidly in or out. He will often do the same, even though not nesting and at any time of the year, and frequently, too, just before dark, when taking up his roosting-place for the night, though nothing is apparently disturbing him. I have never been able to understand the meaning of these various performances. The blackbird's song has been noticed in Part I, p. 21. Like the thrush, he is heard best in the spring-time, and in the early morning and evening, singing to his mate upon the nest. But both birds will sometimes sing in the winter on warm days. Many blackbirds are kept in cages, because of their great vocal accomplishments. We all must have seen the blackbird on a lawn looking for earthworms (again like his cousin the thrush), and breaking snail shells taken in the beak and struck against a stone. The cock is at once known by his intense velvet black

plumage, that of the hen being brownish and sometimes even quite grey. He has also fine yellow eyelids, and a markedly yellow beak. The beak does not, however, become of this deep colour till the spring after his birth, being brown till then. The hen is somewhat the smaller bird, and is not so active, nor does she show the same excitement nor make the same noise as the cock. The blackbird, though so fine in every way, is a great depredator in the fruit garden, though perhaps not more so than the starling and some other birds. He greedily consumes ripe fruits of all kinds, and on this account, and because of his numbers in some localities, he becomes a veritable nuisance. So the fruit grower does not hesitate to shoot him mercilessly. Let no one despise his flesh if he must be destroyed, for he is a toothsome morsel. Again, like thrushes, blackbirds do not flock together; only at nesting time do they consort with the females. During great cold they seek the southern counties, but do not leave the country. They are

found almost everywhere, but chiefly frequent gardens, orchards and vegetable fields. The place to find them in winter is amongst cabbages, first and foremost, and also amongst turnips and parsnips—in fact wherever there are most snails and slugs, there they will be in the winter, and in the summer you will find them where ripe fruit is.

* * * *

This was another day's work amongst the birds. I have called it an 'off' day, because we saw so few birds and took so few photographs. Nevertheless we had seen much of interest. The naturalist can always be learning something fresh, and this is one of the charms of this fascinating branch of study.

CHAPTER VI

IN AN OLD DESERTED GARDEN—MIDDLE OF MAY

A PHOTOGRAPHER in search of nature pictures is ever eager to get where she holds her sweet sway undisturbed. Therefore, when I heard of an old deserted garden, I was not long in taking advantage of the kind permission to visit it with the camera. This garden, situated in the town, had been untended for several years, and was waiting, alas! for an army of workmen with their picks and shovels preparatory to building operations. I have travelled a good deal and seen many gardens, but there is no type that appeals to me so much as the old *English* garden, especially if nature has been allowed to have her way in it. Its links with

the past have a peculiar interest. It is the years and years of nature's quiet work that produce such a scene. The old trees—beautiful in their symmetry alone—rendered still more so by their hoary mantles of moss or bright evergreen ivy, the crumbling red brick walls built by our forbears (the red of quite a different shade to that of modern bricks), hidden here and there by wall cress, ferns, creepers and the like, the mossy winding paths, leading through plots of grass, soft, green, and restful to the eyes; these have not been created in a single day. Here, surely, was a place for birds' nests. Sitting there quietly in the shade on a seat this day in May, with a warm sun shining overhead, and throwing the shadow on the old sun dial to the hour of twelve, whilst the delicious pungent odour of the currant in bloom was wafted to us now and then, it was not many minutes before the feathered occupants, frightened at first by our approach, gathered again. A chorus of chirps and songs now rang out. Two Blackbirds vied with each

other, whilst a more assertive Thrush filled in the interval with its human-sounding trills. We heard the tender little hedge-sparrow close by, and a cock bullfinch displaying his almost crimson breast, and perched—as he loves to be—at the end of a dead bough, gurgled softly to his mate somewhere. Busy, noisy starlings flitted from the chimneys not far off, to the apple and cherry trees, thinking perhaps of the time soon to be, when there would be a feast of fruit for them. Even *their* attempts at song were musical, we thought, and it was pleasant to hear the sparrows' homely chirrups as, almost unheeding us, they busied themselves searching for insects amongst the buds on the twigs which bent down with their weight. Then three or four cocks would tumble to the ground, beaks and claws mixed up in a seemingly inextricable mass, a quarrelling pecking group (as is their wont at nesting time, when they fiercely guard their chosen brides from the impudent attentions of rival suitors). Of course the robin was there ; is

any English garden such as this without one? Chaffinches gambolled in the nut trees, which would later on be showing for fruit. Once, and once only, a wryneck let us hear his quick loud call. He detected our presence, and did not stay even to look at us, nor allowed us to get a glimpse of him. Suddenly one of the blackbirds, abruptly ceasing his song, dashed into a bush close by with that angry scold of his before mentioned, as if this time he wished to say, 'how dare you intrude upon our sanctity?' He was off again in an instant, apparently meaning to tell us, as he repeated his shriek, that he would forthwith go and apprise all his kin of our unwarrantable encroachment on their privacy. We hoped that these birds were nesting in this quiet garden, and there was evidence of this, for, passing an old gate with crumbling brick pillars that led into a paddock on the other side, I picked up the half of a thrush's egg, which told of young having been hatched. This egg was very neatly cracked in the middle. I took it

home and photographed it with another—that of a house sparrow—which I found in my garden, and which was also very evenly fractured. I suppose the instinct of the



PLATE XXX: Eggs of thrush and sparrow 'very evenly fractured' in the hatching. (Full size.)

little unhatched bird when fully developed impels it to get out of the shell, to breathe, and embark upon the sea of life. So it pecks away with all the might of its little beak (which must already be fairly hard) until released. Cramped up as it is in its small prison it cannot change its position, and can only turn round in one direction.

So the division is made neatly all round the middle of the egg, and *just where it ought to be!* The mother bird may assist, too, in the operation when she perceives the egg moving, and the point of the beak showing through the first hole. But the shells of birds' eggs are not always so evenly divided in hatching.

Then we started to explore. The bullfinch, we thought, and the hedge-sparrow must be surely building here. Our surmise was correct. As we approached a deodora tree, a hen bullfinch flew out of its lower branches, and there we found her nest, with four pale blue eggs, speckled and streaked with purple at the larger end. One had probably yet to be laid, as five is the usual number; and out of these would peck their way, in due time, a handsome family. Truly bullfinches are beautiful. The deep black of the head and tail, the rich red breast (some describe it as brick red), are beautifully contrasted with the delicately grey-shaded beak, whilst the black and grey wing is re-



PLATE XXXI: A bullfinch's nest in a deodora tree
seen from above ($\frac{1}{4}$ size.)

lieved—crosswise in the middle—by a bar
of white.

It is the cock bird that shows these colours

to perfection, and he is the sturdier looking of the two. But both male and female are well set up strong birds, with powerful and somewhat arched beaks, which they use to good purpose on the berries of which they are so fond ; and they find them very useful for other vegetable food, including buds—often, unfortunately, those of fruit trees. These constitute their chief food. The male bird is formidable in a fight, though his familiar name of ‘bully’ is not borne out, I think, by any special pugnacious qualities. The photograph does not show the nest well, as it was sunken into the spine-like leaves of the deodora, and had to be taken from above. We were lucky to find this one, as they are often at the tops of high bushes. It was built chiefly of twigs and roots and lined with hair. The nest was an early one, as two or three are built each year. We did not hear the song of the bird. It is not a true song, being only a short and feeble note. The call to the mate is what is known as ‘piping,’ this is not loud either, but very pretty.



PLATE XXXII: 'Both male and female are well set up strong birds.' Bullfinch hen ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

Kept in captivity some bullfinches pipe beautifully, and also learn to imitate sounds. The birds pair for life like pigeons, so if you

see a cock, look for the hen also. They do not migrate.

The garden contained a large shubbery of lilac, guelder-rose, may, laburnum, elder, apple, cherry, nuts and other bushes. Some hops and out-door grape-vines grew promiscuously together to a height of fifteen feet. Other parts were devoted to vegetables, the whole being surrounded by a high wall constructed of those red bricks that used to be made years ago, and which were now crumbling. Winding paths led through the shrubbery to right and left, but they were now so overgrown and weedy that their outlines had well-nigh disappeared. High up in an apple tree a thrush sat upon her nest, her tail being plainly visible overlapping it. We could just see her head, and she detected us, and kept her eyes steadily on our movements, but did not fly off. Just here some bluebells were flourishing grandly in the good loamy soil, enriched by years of fallen leaves, which had been allowed to rot as they fell. The stalks of the flowers measured two feet in



PLATE XXXIII : Bluebells, two feet high.

height, and the colour of the bloom was a fine *deep* purple blue.

As we came to a tall holly tree, a black-

bird flew out. It had a nest at the top, and it would have puzzled any one to get at it. The dead and living branches of a guelder-rose were inextricably mixed up with a may bush. Inside this thicket the hedge-sparrow we had heard continued to tweet its plaintive pleading notes. It was just the spot to find the bird, as it loves concealment, and is solitary in its habits, being seldom seen with another except at nesting time. Parting the twigs and looking into the semi-darkness, I caught sight of the hen. She did not seem frightened. Close by was her nest about four feet from the ground (it is always built low). It was a cup-shaped solid structure, large for the size of the bird, and made of short dead twigs, the cup being three inches across, and lined with horse hair, which was white in this instance. A few ends of red skein wool contrasted strongly with the white hair. There were four glossy pure greenish-blue eggs in it: five are generally laid. Some of the cognomens of our little friend are 'hedge-sparrow,' as it is very fond

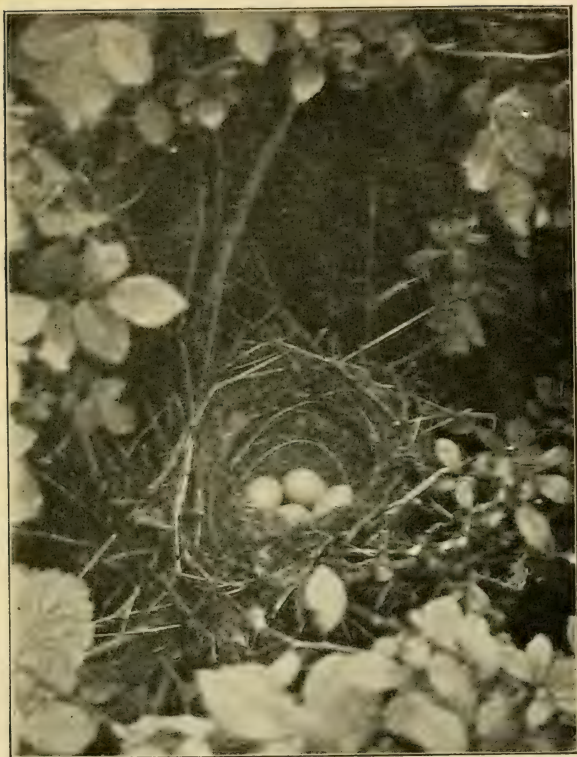


PLATE XXXIV: 'It was a solid structure—lined with horse hair—and contained four glossy pure greenish-blue eggs.' Nest of hedge-sparrow ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

of a dense hedge, 'shuffle-wing,' because it flutters its wings and tail often, and 'dun-nock,' a local name for it, as in the case of

several other birds. It is called a sparrow, and is sparrow-like in the colour and markings of its brown and yellowish-brown plumage, but is really first cousin to the warbler and the nightingale. It possesses no song, only uttering the notes that have been mentioned, but makes up for this deficiency by an unadorned beauty and gentleness all its own. It has the dark liquid eye of the robin, and somewhat of its expression too. One cannot help falling in love with it at first sight. I was very fond of this bird as a boy. When I used to come upon one (in a hedge generally), it would exhibit no signs of alarm, but seemed to regard me as a friend, and remained near me quietly flitting from twig to twig as if loth to part company with me. I know of no other British bird, except the robin, that is so confiding in its ways. Its structure is the opposite of the bullfinch's just described. The body is of slender outline, and the legs, claws and beak are delicate too, so it subsists on such soft food as insects, grubs, caterpillars and the



PLATE XXXV: 'It possesses no song, but makes up for this deficiency by an unadorned beauty and gentleness all its own.' Hedge-sparrow ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

like. The flight is not strong. Though it might be thought that such a tender-look-

ing bird must be seriously affected by cold, it does not leave the country in winter.

The nest was, perhaps, a second one, as the birds build very early (even in March), and rear two or more broods each year. Is it because the hedge-sparrow is so inoffensive that the cuckoo takes special advantage of it and lays its eggs in its nest? We have seen that the homely little robin can be a great fighter with its own species, and it is said that the hedge-sparrow has also terrible contests with others of its kind. In both cases the birds do not seem to fear evenly-matched combatants, which is only fair fighting.

We carefully searched all the thickets, but did not come upon any more nests, and afterwards learned that some boys had been seen in the garden from time to time, and *then we knew the reason*. Before leaving I got a nice photograph of the ivy-leaved climbing snap-dragon, a good deal of which grew on the old walls. Packing up the camera we wended our way to the little gate that had given us entrance. We could not help



PLATE XXXVI: Ivy-leaved climbing snapdragon growing on an old brick wall ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

remarking on the luxuriance of the weeds. Dandelion stalks reached eighteen inches. The leaves, showing well their lion-toothed

edges (French, 'dent de lion') were quite a foot long. Some of last year's teasles had grown ten feet high. Old flower stems of the tansy still standing measured four feet. As we passed out into the high road, an Italian hurdy-gurdy man ground out his old organ, adding to the babel of the traffic. It was a great contrast to the quiet garden we had just left. We were much pleased with our visit to this secluded retreat, but disappointed at finding so few nests. What would not this garden have yielded had it been out in the country? But perhaps it would not have yielded much, for boys are everywhere!

CHAPTER VII

A VISIT TO POCHARD ISLAND—LAST WEEK IN MAY

DURING a visit that we paid at the end of May with the camera to Pochard Island, we saw many interesting things connected with bird life, and some which involved questions which we had no little difficulty in answering. The country was now at its best. Wild flowers were abundant ; the fool's parsley was specially noticeable ; spreading here and there into great sheets of small white flowers. Its delicate leaves are cut into angles and curves of the greatest beauty, whilst its tender shade of green at this time of the year is exquisite.

As we approached the water a solitary Sanderling kept ahead of us upon the shore. We recognized him, as we had done last year,

by his short flights and quick runs (*see* Part I, p. 57). When on the wing he is difficult to distinguish from a jack snipe, being just about the same size and somewhat the same colour, but the flight is not so erratic. We saw no Tern here this season. A pair of Pied Wagtails kept constantly to one spot. Evidently they had a nest close by, but we could not find it, though we watched the birds a long while. We surprised a mother mallard with a brood of nine ducklings. (The male, as before mentioned, Part I, p. 145, does not keep with the family, leaving them to moult as soon as the eggs are hatched.) They all rushed off in great haste. One duckling—the strongest of the brood—keeping ahead of the others in the wake of their mother, and all waddling their best, the group formed itself into a V formation, which was kept up till they were well out of danger. It was a pretty sight to see them, recovered from their fright, gathering again round their parent, she consoling them with soft quick little quacks and motherly flutterings of her

wings whilst she took short quick paddles round her family. In another part we found a solitary duckling, which swam its fastest away from us, but kept close to the bank. We wondered why it was alone. Had it got separated somehow from the brood, or were its brothers and sisters dead? This last conjecture was probably correct, for a few hours afterwards we found this very bird lying decapitated on the path. It must have been caught and killed by a rat that seized it as it passed, for we saw no carrion crows or hawks, and we were not far off all the while. Close by were several broken and empty duck's eggs, and also some blackbird's. In this case the depredator was probably a carrion crow. The feaster had carried them some distance and consumed them all on one spot, finding the flat path a convenient table on which to take its repast. We were informed that a female mallard had been found badly mauled near by. This was doubtless the bird that had laid the eggs, and the circumstances confirmed our suspicion as to the

crows. An informant thought herons had done the deed. There was a heronry about six miles away, and this distance would not be much for these big birds to cover. But herons are not, I think, egg-robbers. If it had been these birds they must have come over in the night, for none were seen there in the daytime, and they feed at night. Any one who has the opportunity and will listen for their hoarse 'quawks' cannot fail just after sundown, or at any time before sunrise, to catch sight of their great forms outlined against the sky, flying slowly along, high up, their legs dangling out behind, going to water somewhere.

Amongst the branches of a good-sized willow that had toppled from the bank of Carrion Crow Island and lay half submerged, we were surprised to observe a large floating nest. We were glad to see that it contained one egg. The egg was much like a moorhen's (*see* Part I, p. 120) but larger and more pointed, with the same brown but smaller and more numerous spots; the ground colour was a

creamy grey. It was the nest of a coot. This delighted us much, as we had long hoped to



PLATE XXXVII: Half-submerged willow (shadowed in the water), amongst the branches of which a pair of coot built their floating nest.

find one in these waters, having seen some of the birds about.

The site was well chosen for a floating nest, as, though quite free to rise and fall with a

change in the height of the water, it was imprisoned by the branches of the tree. So well are coot's nests put together that, though sometimes washed out of their places in a flood, they do not fall to pieces, and the bird will go on sitting as if nothing had happened. This Noah's ark like structure was $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 18 inches broad and stood quite a foot out of the water, being quite out of proportion to the size of the birds. The floating foundation was of dead sticks; on these was reared the body of the nest, composed entirely of round slippery stems of floating pond-weed, each stem three or four feet long, and quite fresh, the terminal leaves being green and intact. They must have been pulled out one by one from the bottom of the water and brought several hundred yards, as we saw none growing nearer. They were cleverly twined round each other, so as to make the shape oval. The nest was almost flat and had no lining, so the single egg seemed to be in a very unsafe position. But afterwards the birds buttressed up the

sides with some sticks and deepened it for six more eggs that were subsequently laid. I am sorry that we had no opportunity of



PLATE XXXVIII: Floating nest of coot, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 18 inches broad, built amongst the branches of a half-submerged willow, and standing a foot out of the water—with the first egg laid.

observing if the eggs were hatched, or whether the crows or rats got at them.

I saw the male bird swimming about, but

he hid himself as soon as he was observed. He resembled a moorhen in general appearance, but was larger and stouter, with a more pointed tail and also had a dull white or flesh-coloured beak, as well as a white patch on his head in front. This mark is very distinctive, and has bestowed on him the name of 'Bald Coot' or 'Baldicoot.' He has a narrow white line across the wing to relieve his general blackness, but this is not well seen from a distance; the legs and feet are green. The toes are peculiar, being expanded on both sides into flat round membranes each the size of half a sixpence, two or three to each toe. These add greatly to its swimming powers, and it spends much of its time on the water like a duck. Though thus partially web-toed, the bird is said to be a much better percher than the moorhen, and to be able even to climb a tree, being assisted in this respect by strong claws. It uses these toes with good effect in fighting, like the domestic cock. The bird's single '*kraak*' is like the moorhen's cry but sharper and in a higher

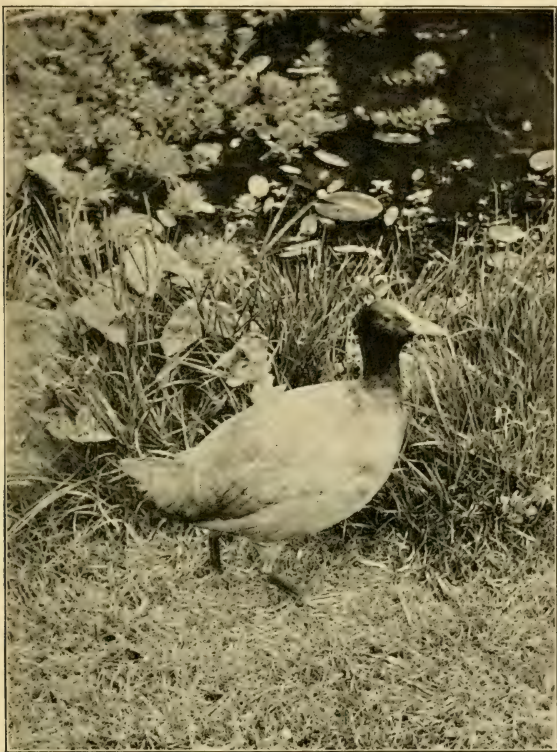


PLATE XXXIX: 'He resembled a moorhen in appearance, but was larger and stouter, and had a white patch on his head in front.' Coot, young male ($\frac{1}{5}$ size).

key. It is said to be uttered before bad weather.

I do not know if these coot remained in these waters the whole winter. Many are constant residents in this country, but some migrate. In flight they keep their legs stretched out behind, as does the moorhen and also the heron. Migration, as in the case of most birds, is effected at night time. Coot, when rising on the wing, seem to have some difficulty in doing so, as they make a splash in the water with their feet.¹ Their food is chiefly small fish and water insects and the buds and leaves of aquatic plants.

Close to the nest we noticed a patch of rushes pressed down into a round shape. This might have been the spot first chosen for the nest, as they often build on land close to water. But they were wise in this instance, because of the carrion crows' home being so near, to decide on a floating nest. (The taking of the photograph was difficult, as I had to do it from the boat, *in which* I reared

¹ Non-aquatic birds have no power of rising off the water and will drown if they have fallen into an enclosed place.

the camera legs, and gave a four-seconds exposure at $F/16$, whilst Ted steadied the boat by holding on to a branch of the willow.)

Only two or three of the tufted ducks which we had seen at the beginning of the season were there now. They had either left at the end of a visit of five or six weeks— attracted by the quiet spot and abundant aquatic plant food—or had been scared away by the carrion crows. On Pochard Island we again (*see* p. 60), suddenly came upon a ringdove sitting on her nest built in a thicket and only eight feet from the ground, again a low elevation for a pigeon's nest. The bird did not seem frightened, and we got within fifteen feet of her, not venturing nearer for fear of disturbing her. I could see the iridescent feathers and the white mark or 'ring,' as it is called, on her neck, showing her at once to be a ringdove (or woodpigeon) and not a stockdove—and certainly not a turtledove. She must have seen us, but the thick undergrowth and the resulting semi-gloom gave her a sense of security ;

perhaps, too, the eggs were nearly hatched. She allowed me to fix up the camera and focus ; this I did very quietly, fearing each moment that she would get up. I certainly thought the focussing cloth would scare her, but it did not, nor did she move a feather whilst I gave two exposures of as much as three and five minutes, the lens at $F/32$, with a fast plate. I am sorry to say that the result is not worth reproducing, and it illustrates again the general futility of taking such pictures, owing to the lack of contrast. When I had taken the photo we approached the nest, and she then left it deliberately with a great clatter of her strong wings. We found the usual two pure white eggs. Just two feet above her nest was an old black-bird's. Whilst I was exposing we kept as still as mice, and were treated to the beautiful song of a sedge-warbler. He came right over our heads on the bush tops, as is his manner, and only a few feet away. His knowledge that something unusual was near made him warble all the more ; this is another

characteristic of the bird, as we have before noticed. At last he caught a fair sight of us and flitted off, but only a short distance, and then redoubled his vocal efforts. Being so close to him we were able to distinguish him by the yellowish streak over the eye from his first cousin the reed-warbler, whom he so closely resembles in form, colour and song. The fact that he did not leave the bushes made us conclude that he had a nest near by. But this was not the case. This spot was, however, the selected one, but the nest was not built till as late as the middle of July. When we found it it was about ten feet from the ground, and the materials, as usual, were wound round the supporting twigs.

We also found a thrush's nest with three eggs, which had scarcely any spots. The eggs were of the true blue ground colour of that bird, and of the proper size, and the nest was lined with clay, so that there was no doubt as to its identity, though we had never seen thrush's eggs like this before.

On Swan Island the swan's nest was empty

and the birds gone. There were no traces of the shells, which was curious. What had become of them? (Last year we had found three unhatched eggs in it. *See* Part I, p. 58.) But we found their soft inside linings, still quite wet. We discovered the old birds swimming about with six cygnets—a fine family. On our approach all the youngsters climbed upon the mother's back and hid beneath her wings, which she kept open and erect to shelter them; it was a very pretty sight. Unfortunately the light did not suit at all, or I would have snapshotted them. Their fright over, the little ones took to the water again. The male bird, as usual, advanced towards us—the embodiment of ferocity.

In the evening I watched a thrush on my lawn looking for worms. It had been raining, and the bird knew the worms would come out then. The ways of the bird thus engaged are very interesting. He hops on to the grass, takes a short run and then stops, all his movements being quietly and noiselessly performed—for the worms would otherwise

at once disappear. You think he is watching *you* the while ; perhaps he is, but he is also looking for the heads of the worms just protruding from their holes. Then he takes another run and another until he has seen what he wants, when he makes a sudden dash for it, seizes the head with his beak and tugs away. Sometimes he does not get a good hold the first time. If so, he has lost *that* worm, for it immediately draws back. Try to catch one yourself, and you will see that you have to be quick and very quiet. Possibly the bird succeeds in getting a piece of the worm, which he promptly swallows, and the worm retires speedily minus a portion of himself. Then the thrush, resuming his little runs and keen glances, succeeds in getting a good hold of a sturdy thick worm six or seven inches long—now watch him ! He fixes his legs wide apart, and pulls and pulls till the worm comes out in one piece. He lays it out on the grass, and paralyses its movements by numerous pecks in various parts. Finally he swallows it, generally whole unless he has broken

it up, shakes himself to get it well down, and flies away. One large entire worm seems to satisfy him, and he may then voice his thankfulness for the evening meal sitting on his favourite dead twig somewhere.

Another sight I sometimes see on my lawn is that of a house-sparrow robbing a starling of his food. The effrontery of the smaller bird is remarkable and clever. He watches the starling till he has found a tit-bit—being not clever enough or too lazy to find it for himself—and then by a sudden dart snatches it from even his very beak. The good-natured starling takes this treatment quite as a matter of course, and pursues his even course strutting and hurrying along in search of more tit-bits.

On Pochard Island we had found a late mallard's nest with nine eggs. Amongst them was a rounded stone larger than any of them. Whether it had been placed there purposely, and, if so, for what reason, or whether the nest had been built over it, I do not know.

CHAPTER VIII

A FIELD DAY AMONGST THE WOODLAND BIRDS —EARLY JUNE—OUR LAST EXCURSION FOR THE SEASON

BIRDS naturally inhabit the localities for which they are structurally suited. Thus aquatic birds provided with long or webbed feet adapted for wading or swimming will be found only where there is water. Other species live in dry places, but of course not far from where some water can be found to drink and bathe in, whilst a few, such as the sparrow, robin, blackbird, thrush and others, may be found anywhere. Woodlands harbour many kinds of birds. Here multitudinous spots are found (on tree, and bush, or on the ground) to suit the various positions that they prefer. The more delicate birds, which are mostly small, find much protection

here from the elements ; and woodlands, too, are generally little disturbed. Thus it was that Ted and I discovered many species during a visit to a well-wooded district close to London. After twenty minutes in the train an hour's pleasant walk brought us to our objective—a long lane with which Ted had previously formed acquaintance. The road turned into woodlands almost immediately we left the station. Fine old trees were there in varied array, their foliage still of the tender shade of spring, and all the greener for much recent rain. The birds were nesting, of course, and in full song. One or other of them was heard at almost every step of the way throughout the whole day.

The first species to attract our attention was a pair of Spotted Fly-Catchers. They were sitting on a fence and seemed quite tame (as they always are). They were evidently feeding their young, for every now and again they would take a quick turn into the air, catch an insect in their beaks, and disappear into a shrubbery, from which they

soon returned, alighting almost on the same spot each time. The fly-catcher is well named. A large notice, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' a high fence, and some exasperating barbed wire kept us from making further investigations with regard to them.

The fine gravel road wound for miles and miles up hill and down dale. Here was a delicious little country cottage, where Darby and Joan tended their small garden, paying careful attention to the clematis and roses upon the trellis of the portico and against the walls, and dividing their summer time between the flowers and the cocks and hens in the little farmyard at the back. Then came the pretentious house, with a large garden and paddock. And again a handsome gateway proclaimed the entrance to an old ancestral home far away upon the hill; it was approached by a long carriage drive winding through well-stocked shrubberies up which a handsome motor car puffed its way, a supposed improvement on the good old carriage and pair. And then for half a mile or so

we walked between hedges or fencing, skirted by open meadow land with grazing cattle, sheep and horses, or by dense thickets, tall trees and isolated spinneys for the game. Through occasional gaps the open country was visible, stretching away as far as eye could see. It was made up of meadow land with grass (especially tall this year and almost ready for the scythe) or darker patches of green which indicated a well-wooded part. And I must not forget God's acre and the little country church nestling amongst the sacred yews planted many years ago. A little brook meandered in and out (it has a name I suppose) almost overflowing its banks. At one spot was a sheet of the water-buttercup, spreading right up to the little bridge, its hundreds of small white floating blooms all turned one way—to the sun that gave them life. This was indeed bird-land, and we found it flower-land as well. Besides numerous thrushes, blackbirds, robins, larks, chaffinches, rooks, swallows, house-martins, swifts, and of course sparrows, we saw or

heard the following birds during the few hours we spent here (I took a note of each) : hedge-sparrow, chiffchaff, cuckoo, red-backed shrike, pied fly-catcher, willow wren, whitethroat, wryneck, greenfinch, yellow-hammer, blue tit, nightingale, pied wagtail, common (jinny) wren, bullfinch, moorhen, kestrel, jay, great spotted woodpecker, peewit, ringdove, butcher bird, redstart, crossbill, longtailed and cole tit ; and there were doubtless some others that we did not notice. Oh ! that some fairy had shown us all their nests ; but to photograph them, which I always do in duplicate, would have needed many journeys with the half-dozen double slides which I generally take. But we hope to find them all—some day.

We heard the blackbird and the thrush more frequently than any other bird, but chaffinches proved close rivals. The rich thrills of the nightingale arrested us each time they fell upon our ears—and who could tire of such song ! *They were singing during the day*, be it noted (see Part I, p. 31). The

'*chiff chaff*' of the chiffchaff and the twitterings of the greenfinch could not be mistaken. The yellow-hammer seemed to say 'plenty of bread and butter, but no chee-ee-ee-se.' When the wryneck favoured us little else could be distinguished. There was no doubt about the laughing '*glou, glou, glou, gluck*' of the green woodpecker, nor the noisy '*cheep, cheep, cheep, chirr-r-r-rr*' of the chaffinch nor the plaintive '*tee, tee, tee, tee*' of the hedge-sparrow. The '*coo-oo*' of the wood-pigeon was impulsive and distinct, but had to be distinguished from the '*turr, turr*' of the turtledove. The cuckoo could be heard half a mile away. To distinguish the swallows from the house-martins as they flew past, we waited till their backs were turned, when the pure white lower half of the back above the tail of the house-martin, and its shorter forked tail showed the difference. Most people have one name for both species, that is swallow. When the swallow's tail is fully expanded a large white spot is seen on each tail feather (*see* Plate XLIII). These

points are visible when they cling to the eaves or perhaps when perching on the road—the latter an uncommon occurrence for these birds. If a side view of the house-martin be obtained,



PLATE XL: Fledgling house-martin, showing the white patch on the lower half of the back ($\frac{2}{3}$ size).

the bird appears half white and half black, the black parts being the upper half of the head and the wings. The photograph of the house-martin is that of a fledgling I found

lying in the street. Even this young bird has the white mark well developed. It may have tumbled out of its nest accidentally, or have come off worst in a quarrel with its stronger brothers and sisters before it could fly. I have seen the young, two or three at a time, when almost ready to take wing, sit upon the edge of the nest (*see* Plate XLI), pecking each other mercilessly, all trying either to get the best place or even to dislodge one another entirely, in their efforts not to miss the tit-bits from the attentive, indefatigable parent birds, who keep flying up to the nest from time to time. This perching on the rim of the nest when they sit up for the first time, lasts, I believe, only two or three days. Then, after they have felt their wings a bit, comes the first flight, which is an anxious moment for themselves and their parents. They do not, I think, return much to the nest, but sit about on gutters or ledges, where they keep twittering to remind their parents they are there and are hungry all the time. When strong enough they join their parents in

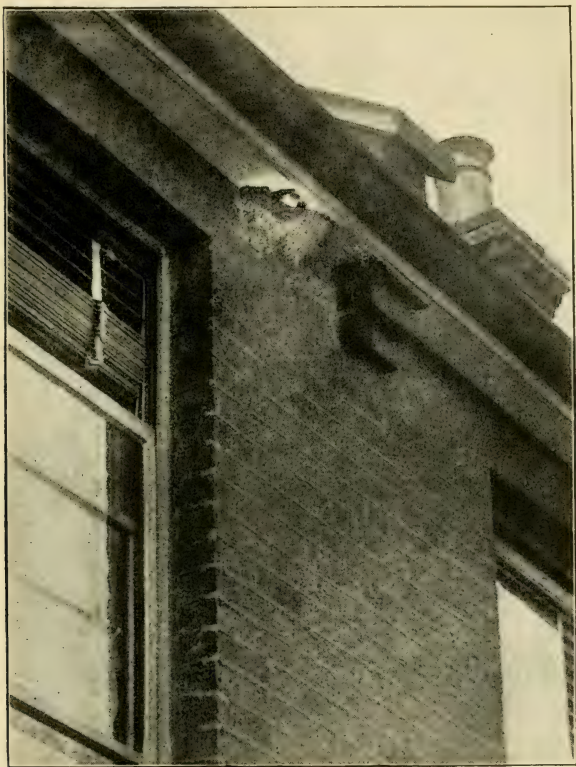


PLATE XLI: Nest of house-martin—with fledgling.
($\frac{1}{12}$ size.)

catching insects, up and down the streets, or in the meadows (their smaller size and feebler flight distinguish them), until they

get quite strong on the wing, and migrate with their parents in the autumn. The old birds lay a second clutch of eggs as soon as the little ones are gone, or even before this, I have thought. Perhaps this fledgling had taken its first flight and collided with the telegraph wires, which seem to be multiplied each week ! Anyhow, some mishap overtook it. I picked it up insensible, and it breathed for several hours afterwards, but finally succumbed—the cause of death was concussion of the brain, I think.

A similar bird to the house-martin and the swallow is the swift. It has a considerably broader expanse of wing than either of the other birds, and is totally black, or rather brownish-black, except the chin which is greyish-white.

The swallow is buff-white on the chest and the under part of the body (not a pure white like that of the martin), whilst the forehead, chin and throat are chestnut, and the back and tail an exquisite shiny deep blue-black. The swallow is larger than the house-

martin. The house-martin's nest is the shape and size of the quarter of a very large coconut. It has an open rim at the top for entrance ; it is left unfinished here, being closed



PLATE XLII : Swift ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

elsewhere right up to the gutter or eave under which it is built. I once had an excellent opportunity of watching one of these birds building ; my bedroom at the top of the house, had a low window and

the gutter ran only a foot above the top panes. Here, just to one side of the window, the birds constructed their home. The intervening glass, which reflected images, deceived the birds, and my presence, as I stood looking at them with my nose almost flattened against the window, was quite undetected. The nest was not more than three feet from my eyes. The busy pair flew continually down on to the road, returning each time with a pellet of wet mud. It is alleged that these pellets are made adhesive by the bird's saliva. Bit after bit was stuck on carefully; the nest gradually assumed a half-cup shape, and was finally completed right up to the gutter, except the narrow rim for entrance. I once noticed house-martins choose a newly-painted wall beneath a gutter for the site of their nest. The paint was sticky, being scarcely dry when they began, and this they probably found out. But their nests have sometimes been built even against a pane of glass. I have been told that sparrows will attempt to domicile themselves in a house-

martin's nest, when the birds will assemble in great numbers, each bringing a bit of mud, and speedily close the entrance up and thus make the sparrow captive, when he dies, of

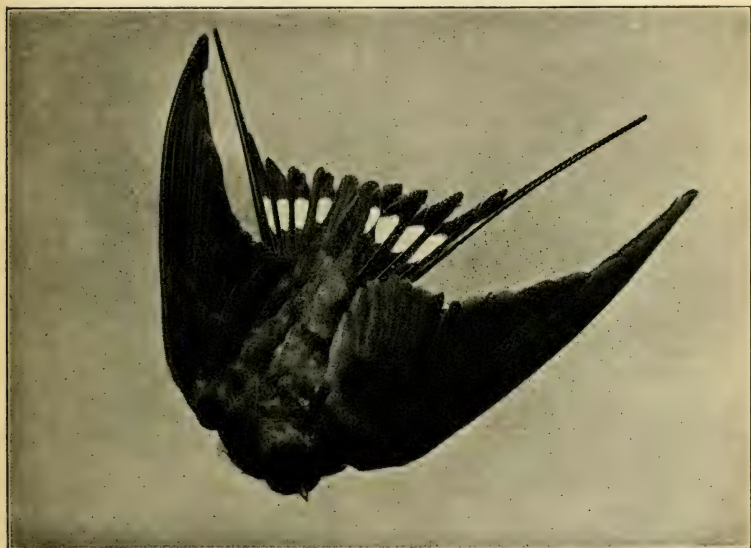


PLATE XLIII: Swallow ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

course, of starvation. On the other hand, a house-martin has been known to build a new nest against its old one of the previous year, which it found in the possession of an impudent sparrow. I read the other day of a man

being considerably frightened by 'swallows'; they were really, I suspect, house-martins. He began to pull down some nests with the aid of a ladder, when he was attacked by hundreds of these birds, which collected as if by magic. Each, as it passed and re-passed, tried to peck his face.

The swift builds in holes in high buildings, in crevices of cliffs, or under thatched roofs, the birds sometimes squeezing through very narrow chinks to get at their nests, which may be only a collection of dirt and débris scratched together; at other times the birds will utilize what is left of some other bird's nest.

The swallow chooses a rafter under shelter, or some platform (e.g. corner in a chimney), *on* which it builds a saucer-shaped nest, lined with feathers. Plate XLIV shows the nest in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, which I was kindly allowed to take. The eggs are a delicate white, spotted purple-red, and are four to six in number. They are considerably bigger than house-martins', and *always have rough shells*

—a very uncommon feature. House-martins' eggs are white, and four or five in number.

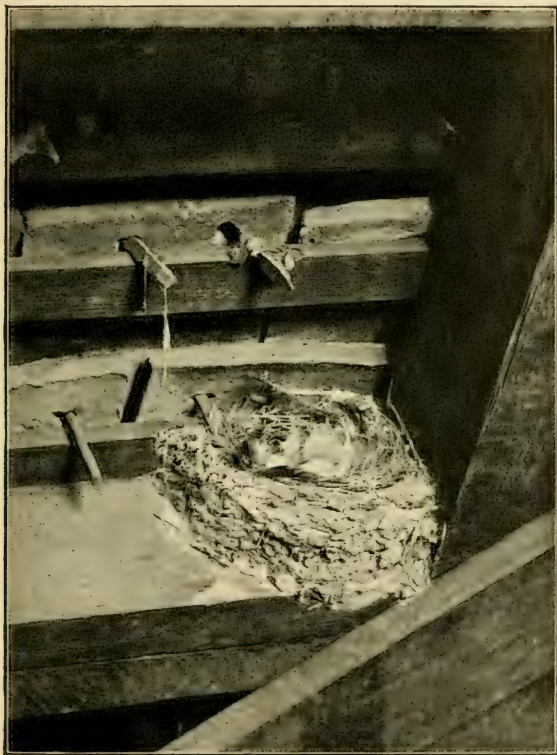


PLATE XLIV: Nest of swallow ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

The white tint of the egg is noticeable, being the usual colour of eggs laid in dark places.

The same is the case with the swift, which lays two or three eggs. This latter bird rears only one brood each year.

The Sand-Martin closely resembles in shape the swallow and the house-martin. It is the smallest of our swallow-like visitors, measuring scarcely five inches in length. Plate XLV is a photograph of the well stuffed birds and fine model in the Natural History Museum, which I was kindly allowed to take with that of the swallow's. The general colour of the bird is a light brown, even to the legs and claws, but the chest and under part of the body are white. The tail is only slightly forked. Though a good flyer, it does not execute the great sweeps made by the swallow, the house-martin and especially by the swift ; nor does it fly so high, but feeds on insect food taken in the air as by its close relations. The nest-holes are made by the male and female in fairly hard and well-packed solid banks of sand (whence their name) inland or near the sea. When the birds meet with obstructions, such as stones, whilst

excavating their nests, they forsake the hole and begin another; hence the number of



PLATE XLV: Sand-martins and their nest-holes
($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

holes that are seen in the banks in which they build, some alone being used for nests. The work is done with their beaks, and completed in about a fortnight. They build in communities, and are very partial to the same spot year after year, and use the same nest-holes. The holes are mostly out of

reach, irritatingly so to the egg-hunter. The shape is circular and large enough to admit the bird easily, and the nests slant slightly upwards or downwards or may be quite level. They may also be straight or slightly tortuous. Some are about a foot long, others are two or three feet or even more. At the end is an excavation about six inches across each way for the nest, which is made of grass and hay, and a few feathers. The eggs in this instance again are white; the shells are very thin. Four to six are laid by the end of May, and there may be two broods each year. Sand-martins are migratory, and arrive about the same time, or earlier, than their before-mentioned relatives, but leave with their young before the others, that is, at the end of September or the beginning of October. They congregate, also like the others, prior to leaving. Some are said to remain during the winter months, only to perish; these may be weaklings. The same may be said of the swifts, swallows and house-martins. The swift has a sharp loud

note which sometimes may be raised to a 'scream.' The others only twitter quietly as a rule, but if the nest be approached the notes are louder, even to a scream. All these birds will mob an attacking or strange bird, such as a hawk, or rook or a crow, in which case they become very excited and their notes of alarm are shrill and piercing.

* * * *

It was difficult to distinguish the sombre-hued nightingale from similar birds as he sat concealed amongst the leaves, but the red-brown patch above the tail, seen as he flies away from you, is plain. What a power of endurance in their long migratory flights, which must be kept up for hours at a time, is possessed by birds, especially those whose flight is of the jerky or looping kind, as with the long-tailed tit, for example. I have seen them at sea ; their method of progression over the water is the same as on land. It would seem as if these birds required a momentary rest between each flutter of the

wings. This is very different from the rapid *continuous* flight of the birds we have just been considering, especially that of the swift. All birds, however, whatever their powers, wait for a favourable wind before they venture (or indeed are able) to leave the coast. In the Channel Islands after a night of north-east, east, or south-east winds blowing from France direct to the islands, sportsmen always expect to find woodcock and snipe in favourite spots the next morning, as soon as daylight allows them to see, the birds having come over in the night.¹ If birds are caught in a head wind they are in a sorry plight ; numbers must perish in their attempts to get to land. I have seen skylarks during high winds so exhausted on reaching the shore that they could not fly, and could be picked up. It is particularly distressing to see birds arrive in a heavy snowstorm, even though there be no wind.

¹ Swallows, martins and swifts may be here to-day and gone to-morrow.

In the meadows were several pheasants that had ventured out of the woods—cover which they do not like to leave unless every-



PLATE XLVI: Wood with felled timber—the pheasants' run.

thing is quiet all around. They scurried back, running rapidly through the grass as soon as we approached. One old cock away down in the valley, or perhaps amongst the felled timber in the wood, every now and

then uttered his 'crow,' which is a single '*crawk*.' He did not seem to say 'are you there?' but rather 'I am here,' letting his numerous wives scattered about feeding or lazing know that he was available for their protection did they need him. Or was it a caution to them not to wander too far away? Perhaps it was a defiant crow of challenge, like that of the domestic cock. Another old bird sat fearlessly in the grass only a few feet from a country cat, which was apparently watching for a sparrow or a vole. The animal and the bird did not seem to heed each other; they probably knew one another and left well alone.

Ted's eye, keen from practice, detected a nest on the roadside in a low wild rose bush, two feet from the ground, in a most favourable position for a photograph. It contained three eggs of a buff or cream colour spotted all over with black or brownish specks, showing it to be the nest of a white-throat, and we saw the hen close by. Four or five eggs are generally laid. The nest was built, like



PLATE XLVII: 'A nest on the roadside in a low rose-bush.' Nest of white-throat ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

many others, of fine dried grass, and lined with hair, and was of the usual size that these small birds build, viz. about two and

a half inches across inside and two inches deep. We had long looked for this nest, especially amongst nettles, of which white-throats often make use, and we were glad to discover one at last. The bird is sometimes called the 'Nettle Creeper.' We hoped to hear the cock sing, but were disappointed. He utters a series of notes, either when perched or in the air, and seems very excited the while, puffing out his little throat and erecting the feathers of his head and wriggling about. (I have noticed the sedge-warbler erect his crown feathers in the same way whilst singing.) He will at times suddenly dart into the air in a jerky manner, and as suddenly drop down again upon a branch. He is of the warbler family, but the song can scarcely be called a warble. The white throat, from which he gets his name, is distinct, contrasting with the plain reddish-brown of the upper part of the chest, and with the grey head.¹ The wings and tail are brown with a tinge of

¹ The head, *a noticeable feature*, is *wide* and *flat*, and bluish-grey on the top.



PLATE XLVIII: 'We saw the hen close by the nest.'
white-throat ($\frac{2}{3}$ size).

grey, the tail having the darker hue, whilst the two outer feathers are almost white: these last are best seen during flight. The back

is marked like that of a sparrow, but the tail is long and the general appearance is quite unlike that bird. It is migratory, reaching us in April and leaving in September or October. It prefers a lonely life, except during nesting time. Its food is chiefly insects (often taken on the wing like the fly-catcher), but it is also fond of ripe fruit. Second nests are rare. There is also the Lesser White-throat, a somewhat smaller and much rarer visitor than the other. Its eggs are white or dull buff marked with greenish-brown blotches and markings of purplish grey.

At last we came to the lane, which was a long one with scarcely any houses or cottages, and a veritable paradise for birds. It continued for at least three miles, and was skirted on each side all the way by a thick hedge of may, at the foot of which ran a ditch ; inside this again was a width of grass, such as is found in many old country roads, originally intended for horse-riders, but now overgrown with brambles ; these are most likely spots for low-built nests. Outside were meadows

or woods, the breeding grounds of pheasants, partridges and rabbits galore. Now and again a bunny would pop across the lane immediately in front of us, a common habit



PLATE XLIX: 'At one end of the lane there was a pond to which the birds could resort.'

with him, just to take stock of whatever might be there—a trick, however, of which the sportsman takes advantage, not to the poor rabbit's benefit. At one end of the lane

there was a pond to which the birds could resort, and whither the cattle from a grazing herd came when thirsty. Besides this, the little brook before mentioned betrayed its presence now and then where not hidden by the greenery. Thrushes and blackbirds as usual favoured the hedges chiefly, and we found many of their nests. The woodpigeons preferred higher positions in trees, and here again we noticed several of their nests half finished. Perhaps one of the reasons why these birds, as well as blackbirds, thrushes and wrens, do not complete their nests is that they are interfered with by egg hunters. From traces we found some one had already been that way, and more than once. We looked carefully for a nest of a chiffchaff, which so likes brambles and grass in which to build, but found only one. It contained six fledglings. As we sat quietly eating our lunch a small brownish bird slyly crept about amongst some twigs ten feet away from us. It was the mother chiffchaff with food for her young. At last she crept noiselessly down

into the grass, but thus betrayed her home. It was a domed nest amongst tall grass on the ground, roofed with dried grass, and had a large opening on one side ; it was concealed from view but was now dilapidated. When we got to it six youngsters scrambled out ; I had hoped they would keep still for a photograph.

There were no magpies here, and scarcely any jays. Gamekeepers invariably destroy these birds which are incorrigible egg robbers, and the men think only of the game they have to protect and produce for their employers when the first of September and of October come round. Linnets and goldfinches were missing, too. The young rooks were flown, and no carrion crows frequented these parts. And there were no ferns ! We concluded that they had all been removed to gardens long ago, or dug up by hawkers for sale. The soil and damp, together with the abundance of shade, made this an ideal nursery for them. It must be for such reasons that ferns are never seen until you get far out into the less visited country. At the



PLATE L : ' It was alongside the road, built in the twigs of an elm and well hidden.' Nest of willow wren ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

head of the lane Ted found the nest of a willow wren, tucked away in the short branches of an elm, five feet from the ground. It was a



PLATE LI: 'Much like a sedge- or reed-warbler, but the tint is palish olive green.' Willow wren(or warbler) ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

neat globular domed nest, about the same size as the common jinny wren's (Part I, p. 83), and something like the house sparrow's

(Part I, pp. 101-2), with a hole at one side for entrance, as they have. It was alongside the road, but so well hidden that only a practised eye would have detected it, and many people and vehicles must have passed close to it. There was a heap of decaying straw near by, from which the birds had taken the material to build their nest. The male kept near us during our investigations, plaintively chirping the while. The interior of the nest was well lined with feathers to hold seven small eggs of a pure white ground colour, with spots and blotches of a reddish-brown. The shells were very thin and brittle. The willow wren is much like a sedge- or reed-warbler in shape, and indeed willow-warbler is another name for it, but the tint is a palish olive green in the upper parts and yellowish-white underneath, and the bird has a narrow streak of yellow near the eye. This colouring of the plumage, the build of the nest and its position, together with the colour of the small eggs, at once distinguish this bird from the warblers. The bird is one of

our earliest visitors, arriving in March. Its habits in respect of its active and ceaseless movements resemble the warblers. Few know the willow wren's song, and I must be included in the number. It is described as being very beautiful, one of the finest amongst those of our yearly visitors, and is prolonged right up to July from the time that the bird arrives, and even until it moults at the end of August, only to be renewed in September before he leaves us. It is not loud, and is therefore, doubtless, not noticed amongst other birds of more pronounced capabilities.

The next photo I took was of a chaffinch's nest. There were several here, and indeed they are common in many places. It contained five eggs of a light blue-green ground colour, spotted and blotched with reddish-brown at the larger end : these markings vary much in position, size, and intensity. The long-tailed tit takes the first place amongst British birds in the architecture of its nest (*see* Part I, p. 86), and the chaffinch has the prize for the prettiest. The green moss



PLATE LII: 'The Chaffinch must have the prize for the prettiest nest.' ($\frac{1}{4}$ size.)

with which this one was made (they are not always alike), and the neat lining of hair and a few feathers, were very attractive; these

nests are always beautifully circular in shape. The nest is solidly put together, and will stand a good deal of knocking about ; it is traversed by twigs, round which the materials are twined and bound (Plate LII). The nest is generally in a close-set bush. The song of the chaffinch is remarkable in being so vigorous and often repeated. The bird seems impelled to sing even under the most adverse circumstances. Observe one of the bird-catchers so frequently seen about, especially on Sundays, with a cage under his arm. In many cases it contains a cock chaffinch. This may be a tame call-bird or one recently caught. Even in the latter case, whilst being carried along confined in so small a prison and covered over with a black cloth in darkness, the bird will often keep up his '*chipp, chipp, chipp, chipp, chirr-rr-rr-rr-rr.*' Indeed, if one is near by, the loud, noisy and determined notes suddenly coming from an unexpected and unseen source astonish one not a little. From the ceaseless efforts that all newly-caught birds make to get out of their small

cages, it would scarcely be thought that any of them could sing under such circumstances. Some think that this song is due to an inherent combative instinct, causing them to be constantly challenging other cocks possibly within hearing. These notes are not the only ones the bird utters, and are different to his '*pink, pink*' call note which is heard as he sits on a tree top and may be intended for his hen. Both sounds are pleasing, but can scarcely be dignified into songs if compared with those of other birds. The chaffinch is most noisy when his courting begins in February. The birds pair in March, and the nest is ready for the eggs by April. The chaffinch is about six inches long. He is handsome in the variety of colours he displays, thus the forehead is black, with a creamy head, whilst the back of the neck is blue, the back is chestnut with green at the lower end, the breast is reddish chestnut, and the lower part of the body in front white. The wings are black crossed by white bands. Besides these there are touches of green and yellow



PLATE LIII: 'The whole appearance of this bird gives the idea of what the schoolboy calls "cheeky."' Chaffinch, hen ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

and grey about the body and wings. The female's colouring is more subdued, the crown and breast being yellowish. Most

chaffinches migrate in winter, collecting into flocks for the purpose, but some, mostly cocks, remain throughout the year. The birds arrive also in flocks. The parents remain with the young whilst they are learning to take care of themselves (*see* Part I, p. 108), and afterwards rear another and perhaps a third brood. At the time of leaving this country the cocks separate from the hens, and thus the male has got the name of the 'Bachelor Finch.' The food is insects, often taken in the air, and seeds. Their sharp little beaks are used to good effect in self-protection as well as in feeding, for the birds are very pugnacious, even showing this instinct by singing one against the other. The whole appearance of this active and noisy bird gives the idea of its being what the schoolboy calls 'cheeky,' and it certainly looks gay.

We strayed into a wood, invited by a path. The very first wild roses we had seen this season were just out. It was a very sheltered spot. Amongst many other flowers the germander speedwell — a little flower with a



PLATE LIV: 'Against an oak—a few feet from the ground—was another nest.' Nest of spotted flycatcher ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

white eye that seems to look at you—was the most charming. Against an oak in the wood, a few feet from the ground and almost hidden

by its leaves, was another nest trimly built on short twigs growing out from the trunk, situated like the willow wren's before described. We counted five eggs of a creamy-white colour, with specks and large blotches of a faded blood-red. It was about the same size as the chaffinch's, and consisted of moss and lichen, with a lining of feathers. Watching for the builder, we saw it was a spotted flycatcher. As we had seen a pair of the birds a few hours before, we were delighted to find a nest of theirs. Dear little trusting birds are these ! They are fond of gardens and the vicinity of houses, and like to build in trellis-work or a nook in an outhouse or a stack of wood. They will return to the same spot year after year, but rear only one brood each season. A pair built in the porch of a house of a friend of mine for several seasons, not heeding the many passers in and out. If there be a high post anywhere or a dead twig standing out from a bush or tree, this is a point of vantage that they like from which to catch insects in the manner



PLATE LV : ' If there be a high post—this is a point of vantage that they like.' Spotted flycatcher, male ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

we had witnessed in the earlier part of the day. Look as you will, these insects are

often invisible, but the sharp-eyed little bird detects them easily and takes them with an audible snap of the beak. This habit has given the spotted flycatcher the name of 'Post, Rafter, and Beam Bird,' 'Bee Catcher,' and the like. It is only during nesting time that a pair are seen together, as we had seen them in the morning. Some have called the bird 'mopy,' and he gives one this idea, as he sits alone with his head rather down on the shoulders and his legs bent, but the idea is dispelled when his activity is noticed. He is late in making his appearance on our shores, arriving in May, and leaving in September or October. Sober tints characterize the plumage; the upper parts are brown, the head streaked longitudinally with dark brown, the under parts white streaked longitudinally with the same colour, and brown streaks show on the breast—whence its name (distinguishing it from the *Pied* Flycatcher, quite a different bird, which is white on the under parts of the body—and is also much rarer and seldom found in

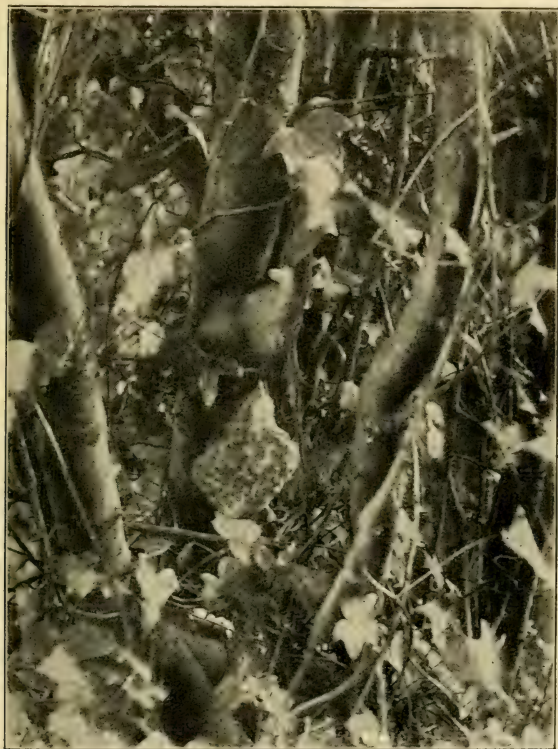


PLATE LVI: 'We thought it was asleep.' Fledgling thrush waiting to be fed ($\frac{1}{5}$ size).

the south of England). There is a little red on the sides, whilst the tail is darker. The male and female are much alike. It has

no marked song, and only chirrup weakly now and then.

The dependence of a young bird upon its parents for food, even though out of the nest, was well illustrated by a fledgling thrush which we discovered sitting patiently in the fork of a tree. It was in an expectant attitude, with its head thrown back, a position from which it did not move whilst I took two exposures at a distance of six feet of two and a half minutes each (the lens at F/32), necessitated by the bad light and the waning day. We thought it was asleep, but when I approached to remove an ivy leaf close to its head that kept moving with the breeze, for a third photograph, it fluttered away with a squeal of distress. Plate LVI, which shows the bird, illustrates well the remark I made in the introduction of Part I that photographs of *living* birds for descriptive purposes are often unsatisfactory, because the background and surroundings show no contrast to the subject.

Though we had seen many nests this

pleasant day, we had found only three that we had not discovered before when out together with the camera. Nor was this to be wondered at: nests in hedgerows are easy to see compared with those built on the ground, and it was these latter we sought particularly. Their discovery needs much experience and patience, with indefinite time at one's disposal. There are often no indications to lead you to the nests, unless you are fortunate enough to see the bird leave and you mark the spot. To find them without a clue is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Much ground has to be searched carefully. One way of spotting them is to sit down, well concealed, and wait patiently till the birds previously disturbed by your advent return. Then watch them closely and see where they go. They may be building, or perhaps only part of the clutch is laid, and the birds are therefore not sitting yet, or they may be seeking the nest to lay. Again, young may be hatched, in which case you will probably see both the parent birds carrying food to

them, or make a sudden loud noise, and watch to see where the birds fly from. In one of these ways you may be able to find the nest.

It was pleasant wandering about in this favoured spot, but time failed us all too soon. We were not tired, even after our long day, for if there is a motive, and that a pleasant one, the powers of the body do not fail so easily, although one is hard at work. But all good things must have an end, and our final jaunt together for the season was over.

The sun gleamed out the last two hours of the day, casting long shadows through the glades and brightening the tints of tree and plant and meadow all round, whilst in the distance the red brick cottages, scarcely noticeable before, stood out clearly, and the plentiful white may blossom, though fading now into rose, showed up in bright contrast to the herbage. The birds were still singing as we made our way to the station. Perhaps their evening songs are the sweetest of all.

* * * *



PLATE LVII: 'It was merely a depression in the grass, but plentifully lined with dark brown almost black down.' Nest of wigeon ($\frac{1}{8}$ size).

I found one more nest this season. Walking along the mainland near Carrion Crow Island

a brownish-black backed duck suddenly flew out and dived into the water almost at my feet. I did not know the bird, but on going to the tussock of grass which the bird had left, saw a nest with seven eggs, the size of ducks', but more oval, and not greenish like the mallard's or the pochard's (*see* Part I, p. 122) but of a putty or cream colour. This I took to be a Wigeon's nest ; and the bird I had seen to be the hen, as I will show. It was lucky that I had the camera with me, as authorities state that the wigeon rarely breeds in the south, migrating in April or May to the north of Scotland and Ireland for the purpose ; they spend the winter months from October in search of food on mud flats and inland waters, mostly near the sea, where they are found in great numbers. At the breeding season the male wigeon has very fine plumage, and its colours are diversified. The bill is dull blue, forehead and crown cream-white, neck and front of body chestnut with some spots of dark green, under part of body white and grey, shoulder white, end of wings black, and tail

and legs brown. But just after the breeding season he loses his finery, like the mallard (*see* Part I, p. 92), and moults to sombre hues. The females are merely brown and black,

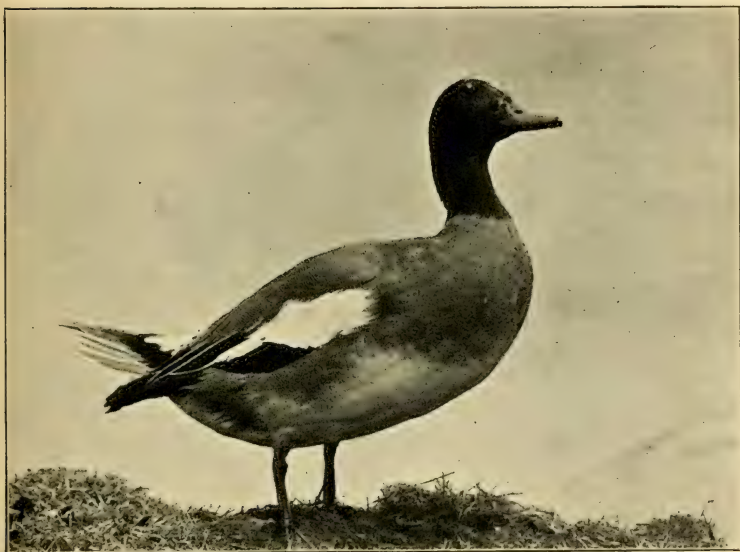


PLATE LVIII: 'The male wigeon has very fine plumage.' ($\frac{1}{5}$ size.)

with the under part of the body white, *as was the case with the bird I had seen.*

I found the nest on July 1, which is late for a duck's nest, though they occasionally

lay even in August. It was merely a depression in tall grass, but was plentifully lined with dark brown, almost black, down, and was close to the water. The hen did not lay any more eggs, but we had no opportunity of noticing whether the brood were hatched. After taking the photographs I watched to see if she would return to the nest. She did return, but not for quite twenty minutes, and then with great caution, swimming and making dives towards it, and getting closer each time.

EGGS OF THE BIRDS DESCRIBED

Birds' eggs often vary, some considerably, in the colour, shades, shape, size and distribution of the markings, and sometimes even in the outline of the shell. The average period of incubation is about two to three weeks.

COLOURS OF PLATE LIX.

WILLOW WREN
Pure white, spotted reddish-brown (shell very thin)

CHAFFINCH
Pale bluish or bluish-green, streaked and blotched dull purple (most at larger end)

HOUSE MARTIN
Pure white (no markings)

ROBIN
Pale reddish-white, with darker red blotches and spots

HEDGE SPARROW
Pure greenish-blue (glossy)
SWALLOW
White, spotted purplish-red (variable)

SWIFT
Pure white (no markings), shell *rough* (shape a long oval)

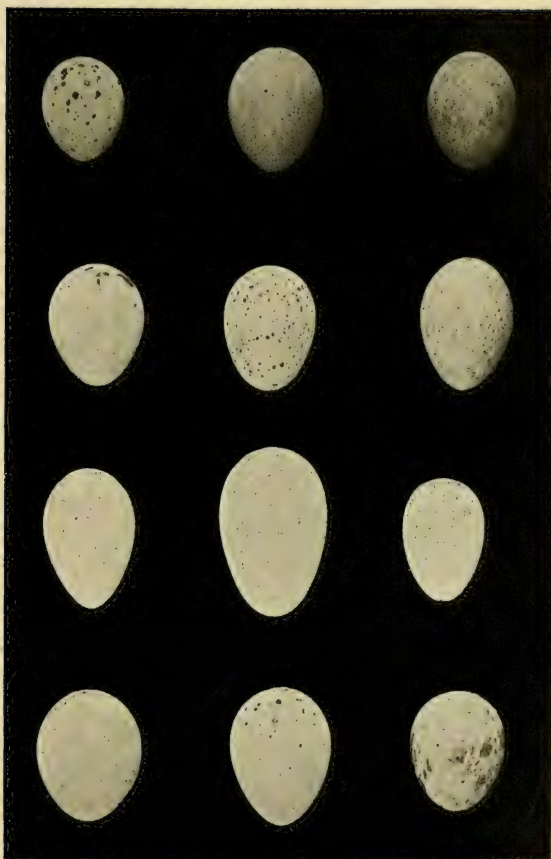
BULLFINCH
Greenish-blue, spotted and streaked dark purple (most at larger end)

REED WARBLER
Greenish-white, blotched and freckled ashy-grey

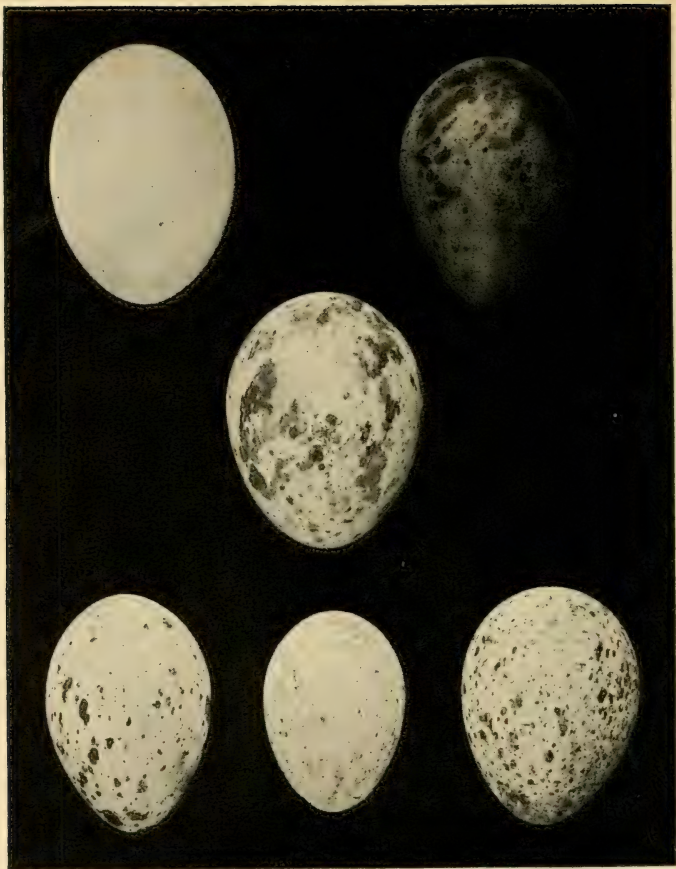
WHITETHROAT
Dull greenish-white, speckled olive-grey or greenish-grey

SAND MARTIN
Pure white (no markings, shell thin)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER.
Pale greenish-white or bluish-white, blotched and clouded reddish-brown (faded blood-red)



LIX (NATURAL SIZES).



LX (NATURAL SIZES)

RINGDOVE (WOODPIGEON)

ALSO STOCKDOVE AND TURTLEDOVE
(the size varying with the size of the bird)

All—pure white, polished

FULL SNIPE

Olive-white, spotted rusty-brown
(most at larger end)

CARRION CROW

Pale bluish-green, spotted and
blotched olive-brown

JACKDAW

Bluish-white, or pale greenish-blue, with dark brown and purplish spots

BLACKBIRD

Light greenish-blue, mottled pale brown

ROOK

Bluish-green, spotted greyish-purple, and dull brown



LXI (NATURAL SIZES)

Coor

Pale stone, speckled with dark brown spots (some very minute)

WIDGEON

Cream (or putty) coloured

(The markings in the photo are due to the egg being soiled)

SYNOPSIS AND ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF THE BIRDS MENTIONED

I. BLACKBIRD

(Pages 94-100)

Turdus merula, of the same family (Passerine) as the thrush (*Turdus musicus*), and about the same length (10 in.). (*Turdus*, Lat., thrush; and *merula*, blackbird; French, *merle*). **Cock**: entirely black in plumage (most brilliant in spring), **Bill**: Bright yellow (after first moult). **Eyelids**: Orange yellow. **Female**: Brownish-black, lighter on breast and throat, with a red tinge here. Yellowish at nesting time. **Found**: Almost everywhere. Frequents hedges, copses, thickets, furze, also gardens, lawns, cabbage fields, etc., where snails, slugs, worms, caterpillars, etc., abound, and fond of ripe fruit. **Flight**: Not prolonged, low down. The male has a peculiar **habit** of dashing in or out of seclusion if disturbed, uttering loud 'scolding' notes. **Not migratory**, but some go south in severe weather. Alone except at nesting time with female. **Note**: Described as flute-like, and more accomplished

than that of the thrush (*see* Part I, p. 21). Sings (like thrush) most at nesting time (spring) and in the morning and evening, also on the warmer days in winter. Kept in cages for its song. **Food** : *See* above. **Plumage** : *See* above. **Flesh** : edible, delicious and wholesome. **Nest** : In early spring. **Situated** : Mostly in hedges and evergreens ; generally not very high up. Cup-shaped, open. **Made of** : Roots and grasses, held together with clay, *but not lined with mud or clay inside* like the thrush's. **Second nests** : Two or even four yearly. **Eggs** : Light greenish-blue, mottled with pale brown. Four or five.

2. BULLFINCH

(*Pages* 106-110)

Pyrrhula europæa (Greek, *pyrrhos*, fire red ; from breast). (One of the Finch family, *Fringillidæ*, which mostly have strong, sharply-pointed, short bills. 'Bully' a pet name. *Bull* may be from its general robust appearance, as compared with other finches. *Finch* : Saxon, *finc* ; Swedish, *fink*, *finke* ; Danish, *vink*). A handsome, familiar many-coloured bird, often kept in cages, with a strong somewhat arched beak and thick throat, black head, crimson (brick red) breast, grey-black back, purple-black tail, and wings barred with white. **Female** : Breast and back brown. **Found** :

Generally distributed, frequents trees, woods, thickets, hedges, and also gardens and orchards for buds of trees and ripe fruit. **Habits** : Seldom seen on the ground ; not shy. **Not migratory**. They pair for life. Remain with the young during autumn and winter. **Length** : 6 inches (about). **Note** : The well known ' piping,' for which they are kept in cages (as well as for their handsome appearance) ; it is their call note (melancholy to some people) ; also a different, weak, often repeated phrase. **Food** : *See* above, and also privet berries, hips and haws, dandelion seeds, in winter, also ground-sel, etc. A diet of hemp seed exclusively is said to turn the plumage black. **Plumage** : *See* above. **Nest** : Beginning of April. *Situated* : In lower part of a tree or in evergreens (hollies, yews, etc.), *amongst dense foliage*. Open, cup-shaped, *peculiar in having a raised rim and a platform outside*. *Made of* : Twigs and fine roots, and lined with horsehair, and sometimes the seeds (pappus) of the coltsfoot, etc. **Second nests** : Two, three and sometimes four yearly. **Eggs** : Greenish-blue, spotted and streaked dark purple-brown, or pinkish-brown. Five generally.

3. CARRION CROW

Corvus corone (other members of the Crow family, *Corvidæ* are the rook, jackdaw, hooded crow and

raven. The name Crow is probably from the cry. (Sax., *crâw*; German: *Krâke*; Lat., *crocio*; Gr., *krazo*, to croak. *Corone*, Gr. *koronos*, curved, referring probably to the beak). A large entirely black bird, undistinguishable at a distance from the rook, but differs in having short stiff hairs at base of beak. **Found**: Widely distributed in isolated wooded places, away from human habitations. Fond of the same spot for roosting and nesting. Frequents also banks of rivers, canals, etc., and the sea shore. **Habits**: Solitary or with a mate (they pair for life). Feed sometimes with rooks and jackdaws. Occasionally two or three pairs will nest near each other, never in communities like rooks. Very wary, and difficult of approach. **Flight**: Undistinguishable from the rook's. **Not migratory**. **Length**: 18 inches (about). **Note**: a harsh 'cor,' 'kor,' or 'corah,' 'korah.' Compare the Latin name *corvus*. **Food**: Carrion (whence name), dead fish, crabs, mussels, etc., and will kill and devour small birds and animals of all kinds. Also robs birds' eggs. Will probably also eat anything edible. **Plumage**: (See above) all black and somewhat lustrous. **Male and female**: Alike. **Nest**: In spring. *Situated*: Half-way or higher up tall trees (elms, etc.), and generally *against the main trunk*. *Shape*: Like a bowl, open, the bowl being about 8 inches across and 6 inches deep, the whole structure about 18 inches to 2 feet high. Solid and

heavy. *Made of* : Heavy and lighter dried sticks as foundation, the bowl being about 2 inches thick, of mud, turf, horsehair, short grass, etc., strengthened inside with fresh strips of bark, and lined with feathers, wool, and soft materials. **Second nests** : Probably only one brood raised yearly. The same nests repaired are probably used for two or three years in succession. **Eggs** : Pale bluish-green, spotted and blotched olive-brown. Four to six.

4. CHAFFINCH

(Pages 167-172)

Fringilla cœlebs. (Lat., *Fringilla*, finch, and *cœlebs*, bachelor, because the males separate from the females in migrating in autumn. *Chaff*, said to be from its love for chaff, or rather the grain found in it. (*Compare* chiffchaff, but which takes its name from its notes.) A common, pretty, neat and noisy bird, often kept in cages because of its plumage and perhaps its song, but wild and not easily tamed. **Plumage** : Of varied colours. **Male** : Crown of head greyish-blue, forehead black, breast chestnut red, wings black with two white marks across them, tail black, the middle feathers grey, the two outer black with a broad oblique white band. **Beak** : Becomes lead-blue at nesting time. **Female** : Head, back and shoulders brown, tinged olive, lower part greyish-white, and the white

wing marks less distinct. **Found** : Universally distributed. Frequents wooded districts, but fond of gardens and orchards. **Habits** : Busy and gay, wary. The males separate from the females in autumn, and congregate in flocks. Some males migrate, but many remain. Return in spring. Also many visitors from the Continent in winter. The parents keep with the young till they can take care of themselves. Cocks very jealous of each other's song, sing in rivalry, or furiously attack each other when singing. Crown feathers (crest) raised if alarmed or excited. **Flight** : Vigorous, quick, graceful. **Length** : 6 inches (about). **Note** : 'Pink, pink,' or 'spink, spink,' and also other lively, quickly-repeated notes, something like 'chipp, chipp, chipp, chipp, chirr—rr.' Most heard in spring. **Food** : Chiefly insects in summer, often taken in the air, like the fly-catcher (which see), and grain and seeds in winter. **Nest** : in April. *Situated* : In a shrub or tree (apple, pear and cherry trees favourites), 6 feet from ground or much higher. Cup-shaped, open, substantial, firmly bound round twigs, neat and *regularly circular*. Very pretty. *Made of* : Grass, lichen, and *very often of green moss*. Materials chosen to resemble surroundings, to conceal it. Often bound with cobwebs firmly twined round the twigs. Resembles goldfinch's. Lined with horsehair, feathers and wool. **Second nests** : Two or three yearly. **Eggs** : Pale

bluish-green, spotted and streaked, and blotched dull purple-brown. Four or five.

5. COOT

(Pages 122-129)

Fulica atra. (Lat., *fulica*, a coot, and *atra*, black. Dutch, *koet*). One of the grallatorial (long-legged, wading) birds of the family *Rallidæ* (Rails). A black *water* bird much resembling the moorhen (which see, Part I), but is larger and plumper, and distinguished from it at once, even at a distance, by its white or 'bald' forehead, the mark contrasting strongly with its dark plumage. **Syn.** : 'Bald coot' (from the mark just mentioned). **Found** : In various parts, where there is suitable wet ground and water, but local. Frequents marshy and boggy places, but prefers *stagnant or slow-running* waters, ponds, etc., and *where there are many reeds and rushes for cover*. **Habits** : Shy, and hides at once if approached. Swims, dives and wades, but also walks in meadows, etc., and can climb trees (claws strong and hooked). **Not migratory** : Except during frost to tidal rivers, mud flats and the sea coast. Many winter visitors from the Continent. **Flight** : Heavy, much like moorhen, legs stretched out behind. **Length** : 17 inches (about). **Note** : A single 'krawk' (like the moorhen's), said to be uttered more just before wet and stormy weather. **Flesh** : Edible. **Food** : Water insects, fish,

leaves and buds of water plants, grass, grain, etc. **Plumage** : Black (darkest beneath), greyish-black on back, with a narrow bar across wings (not well seen from a distance). **Beak** : Dull white, pale flesh (pink) in spring. **Eyes** : Red. **Legs and Feet** : Dark green. **Toes** : Peculiarly webbed with scallop-shaped lobes. **Male and female** : Alike. **Nest** : April, large (*see* Plate XXXVIII), shallow on top, floating (can rise and fall with water), or on land near water, on the ground, in grass, rushes or reeds, etc. *Made of* : Dried sticks for foundation if floating, reeds, flags, etc. Little or no lining. **Second nests** : Probably. **Eggs** : Light stone colour, speckled freely with dark brown spots, some being very minute. Seven to ten, or even fifteen.

6. FULL (OR COMMON) SNIPE

(Pages 51-60)

Gallinago caelestis. (Dutch, *snip* ; Low German, *snippe* ; Dan., *snappe*.) (*See* also remarks under Jack Snipe.) A grallatorial (long-legged, wading) bird. **Found** : In selected boggy and marshy places, where the ground is soft, as it lives chiefly by suction with its bill in the mud. **Syn.** : French, *chèvre-volant* (flying goat), from a noise the male makes (with the wings or beak, or both) during nesting time, likened variously to the

bleating of a goat or lamb. Hence *also called* 'moor, or heather lamb, or bleater.' It rises to a great height, descends suddenly towards the earth (nest or female), and it is then the noise is made. **Distinguish** the jack snipe (which *see*) and the double, great, or solitary snipe, and also the summer snipe (sandpiper). **Found** : *See* above. **Habits** : Cannot perch. If approached squats and is invisible (its plumage, too, is like surroundings), then rises *suddenly*. Will pitch again at varying distances, but if alarmed flies far away, or may return to almost same spot after a long tour. Alights rapidly and in a slanting direction. Usually alone (except at nesting time), or only a few found together ; but in cold weather and on migration large numbers may be found in the same spot (probably attracted by a favourable feeding ground), *but they may be soon gone again*. Some (not many) remain in this country for breeding. Many migrants arrive from the Continent in October and leave in March. **Flight** : Erratic (zigzag) *on first rising*. The crescentic shape of the wings, erratic flight, and alarmed note on rising, once seen and heard are not easily forgotten. May take a tour of many miles, and high up, before settling again—hence name *cœlestis*, Lat., *cælum*, heaven (sky). **Length** : 10½ inches to 1 foot. **Note** : (*See* above), and if alarmed a wild *kchee-a, kchee-a* or '*cheek-a, cheek-a*' *on rising*. It calls or pipes to mate during nesting time, *always*

when on the wing. **Food :** Water insects, worms, and some seeds. **Plumage :** Handsome. **Head :** Brownish-black, divided lengthwise by a yellow streak. A similar mark over the eyes. General plumage, a mottled black and rich chestnut brown. Under part of body about the legs, white. **Bill** about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, rather soft. **Eye :** Brilliant, set well back in head. **Male and female :** Alike, female rather the *larger*. **Flesh :** Edible, much esteemed. The bird is much sought after by sportsmen. **Nest :** On the ground, generally in grass, near water, or amongst heather. Slovenly. **Made of :** Only of a few leaves and stalks in a hollow. **Second nests :** Probably not. **Eggs :** Large for size of bird. Olive-white, spotted rusty-brown at larger end. Four or five.

7. HEDGE SPARROW

(Pages 112-116)

Accentor modularis (of the same family as the warblers, robin and nightingale, *not* of the sparrow family). Fond of hedges (hence name). Also called *hedge accentor* (Lat., *accentor*, one who sings, and *modulatus*, melodious, musical), and hedge warbler. **Other syn. :** *Shuffle-wing* (because of its jerky fluttering movements of wings when looking for food), and *Dunnock* (a local name). A common somewhat sparrow-like bird, but

resembles the robin in shape, dark liquid eye, and thin legs. Of gentle appearance and confiding nature. Has a soft pleasant twittering note. **Found** : Generally distributed. Frequents hedges (whence name), orchards and gardens and farmyards, and sometimes (like the sparrow) is seen in gutters and roads feeding. Fond of the same locality. (The cuckoo often deposits an egg in its nest.) **Habits** : See above. Only two or three seen together, often only one. Hops quietly from bush to bush, or inside a hedge. Not shy. (Though tame, it is said to fight fiercely with others of its own species ; compare robin.) **Not migratory**. **Flight** : Low, not quick, not prolonged. **Length** : $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (about). **Note** : 'Cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, chirr—rr—rr,' heard throughout the year. Something like that of the common (jinny) wren. **Food** : Insects, worms, larvae, grubs, and some grains. **Plumage** : Sombre, of a general brown colour. Back and wings reddish-brown streaked with the same colour. Breast and under part of body buffy-white. Neck and throat bluish-grey. **Bill** : Delicate, dark brown, legs and toes dark brown. **Male and female** : Much alike, female slightly smaller. **Nest** : Generally early in April, even in March. *Situated* : Low (3 or 4 feet high) in hedges (hawthorn a favourite), but also in low shrubs, holes in walls, woodstacks, and ivy sometimes. Open, cup-shaped. *Made of* : Twigs, grass, and sometimes straw.

Lined with horsehair, moss, grass, and often bits of wool. **Second nests** : Two or three yearly. **Eggs** : Pure greenish-blue, glossy (no spots). Four or five.

8. HOUSE MARTIN

(Pages 140-153)

Chelidon urbica. (*Chelidon*, Gr., a swallow ; *urbs*, Lat., a city.) The name is connected in some way with Saint Martin (French), patron saint of the weather. A member of the large swallow family (*Hirundinæ*). Known from the swallow, which it much resembles, by its smaller size, shorter wings, and somewhat less rapid flight. Look especially for its *white rump and underparts*, and less forked tail. The black is not so beautifully lustrous as the violet-black of the swallow. Feet and toes downy. The clinging nests commonly seen under house gutters and eaves in towns and country are of this bird, the swallow preferring *interiors* of barns, outhouses, etc., and building *on* rafters, beams, joists, etc., close to roof, a cup, or saucer-shaped nest of mud. **Distinguish** also the swift and sand martin (which *see*). **Found** : Generally distributed. Frequents dwelling houses especially (whence name), flying rapidly up and down streets and roads, also over fields, etc., catching insects in the air for themselves or the young. If in a city they keep to the suburbs mostly, where there is less traffic and smoke. **Habits** :

See above. Confident to the extent of not fearing interference, though building often in thickly populated places (but the nests are always inaccessible). Keep to the same locality, and return yearly to same nest. Many build together, probably because the site is suitable. Parents and young flock together (often in very large numbers) about the middle of October for migration, waiting for a favourable (generally north or north-east or north-west) wind, and then all leave simultaneously. Some (chiefly young) remain to winter, but perish then. Perch sometimes on branches, telegraph wires, and on the ground. Arrive (in early April), a few days *after* the swallow (probably because less swift of flight). **Length** : $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (about). **Note** : A feeble pleasant twitter (especially when feeding young), but if alarmed (by a cat, hawk, cuckoo, etc.), a piercing shrill 'shriek.' **Food** : Insects, taken on the wing, or from walls, etc. (In fine still weather insects fly high, and the house martins—and swallows—will then be seen flying high too.) **Plumage** : *See* above. **Beak** very short. **Wings** (seen when clinging to nests, etc.), reach to end of tail forks. **Male and females** : Alike, except that the white of the female is not so pure, and chest and chin greyish. **Nest** : April. *Situated* : *See* above. **Second nests** : Two broods yearly in same nest. *Made of* : Wet pellets of clay and mud, said to be made adhesive by the bird's saliva. **Eggs** : Pure white (no spots). Four or five.

9. JACKDAW

(Pages 53-60)

Corvus monedula. (Lat., *corvus*, a raven—compare note ‘cor’; *monedula*, a jackdaw, or daw.) (A bird of the crow order. See Carrion Crow.) ‘Jack’ is perhaps taken from his note (see below), ‘daw’ is a generic title. This is the smallest of the large ‘black’ birds in this country. (Somewhat like the chough, but this bird is not a crow, has red beak and legs and is found near the sea.) **Plumage**: Except for a broad patch of grey on the back of the neck (seen even at a distance), which does not appear till after the first moult, and *which is characteristic*, he is entirely black (even the beak, tongue, toes and legs are black). There is a fine deep violet sheen on the back parts. Distinguished as living in communities (and consorting with rooks and starlings), and frequenting and nesting in old ruins, church steeples, cliffs, deserted quarries, etc. (sometimes in a hollow tree), and by his busy, bustling, noisy ways and his often repeated ‘jock’ or ‘chock’ (compare name ‘jack’ daw; daw, an old name for this bird) uttered with a sudden stop. If seen close, the clear bluish-white eye is striking. **Flight**: Jerky, but quick. Alights in an awkward flopping way. **Found**: See above. Widely distributed. Also near the sea, on cliffs and rocks, in the company of sea birds. **Habits**:

Wary (like all the crows), but if taken young will become quite tame, and can be taught to imitate sounds. They are very hardy in confinement. Fond of stealing and concealing bright objects, as silver spoons, forks, etc. Will also rob other birds' eggs. They live in communities (like the rooks), but sometimes a pair may be found alone. Their daily behaviour is much like the rook's (which *see*) and starling's, searching from daybreak to nightfall for food in fields, etc. Fond of chasing each other in the air. The inquisitive side pose of the head is characteristic. Sheep tolerate them on their backs (like starlings), as they look for parasites there. **Length** : 14 inches (about). **Note** : *See* above. **Food** : Eats anything, even to carrion sometimes ; they are useful scavengers, but eat mostly grain, insects, grubs, etc., and soft shell fish on the sea coast. **Males and females** : Alike. **Nest** : About the middle of May. *Situated* : *See* above. Sometimes also low, in rabbit burrows. *Made of* : A motley mass of sticks, often piled up several feet, with some dried grass, straw, etc. ; and a few feathers and bits of wool on the top to receive the eggs. **Second nests** : Sometimes. **Eggs** : Bluish-white, or pale greenish-blue, with dark brown and purple spots. Four to six.

10. JACK SNIPE

(Pages 53-60)

Limnocryptes gallinula. (Gr., *limne*, a pool of stagnant water, and *cryptos*, hidden; Lat., *gallinula*, a little hen; Welsh, *giack*, a snipe.) See 6 (Synopsis), Full Snipe. If you wish to see jack or full snipe, you must *hunt* for them in marshy or boggy ground in favourite spots, and 'put them up'—a good dog will find them—but you can also 'walk them up,' which is, however, laborious. They are rarely seen flying about during the day, except perhaps a few full snipe together during a hard frost, when they do not seem to know where to go, as all the ground is frozen and they cannot feed. If you wait *at dusk* or just after dark in a favourite feeding ground you will *hear* the full snipe 'kcheeing' as they fly in to feed from the surrounding fields where they may have spent the day. If not too dark you may *see* both kinds. The jack is a small kind of snipe (hence probably the name Jack), resembling the Full in shape, plumage and habits, but is a different bird, and is *not the female of the Full*. It differs from it in *size*, quite one-third *smaller* (*length* about 8 in., *beak* $1\frac{1}{2}$ in.); it has more richly coloured *plumage*, but is much like it; it has the same bright eye, *set well back in the head*: its *flight* is even more zigzag (it is considered a feat to shoot one), but it will *pitch again quite close by*

(compare habit of Full snipe), even though it has been hunted with dogs and fired at more than once ; it lies so close that you may sometimes even walk over it ; it is, moreover, *quite silent* (except in its North Russian and Siberian home at nesting time). The French call it the 'deaf snipe.' Lastly, it is a **winter visitor** (never breeds in this country), arriving here in September to October, and leaving again (after having moulted to its beautiful glossy summer plumage) in March to April. Only a few are found compared with the Full or common snipe, and it is generally also alone, or only two or three are found together. The **male and female** are alike. The shape and motion of the wings is characteristic. The flight is quick and erratic, and the wings seem to stop momentarily. The *common sandpiper* (frequenting river banks and shores) is about the same size and appearance when seen on the wing, and *flies like it* : but it is a summer visitor only. It is called the summer snipe. The *sanderling*, another visitor, is something like it, too, in size and flight.

II. REED WARBLER

(Pages 27-29)

Acrocephalus streperus. (Gr., *acrocephalos*, pointed head ; Lat., *streperus*, making a noise). A beautiful small, delicate *visitor* arriving about the middle of

April (at same time as the sedge warbler, but not so common). Very fond of reeds (hence name), and almost always builds in them. Much resembles the sedge warbler (which *see*, Part I), in **length** (about 5 in.), plumage, and song. It, too, is a bird that conceals itself much, and must also be looked for and waited for to be seen at all amongst reeds, rushes, willows, etc., or sometimes bushes and hedges, but *always near water*. If, however, you happen to be near a nest or where it is going to build one, it will reveal its presence by its **notes**, warbling, and all the more the nearer you get to the nest. Keep very quiet, and you will probably get a glimpse of it. It will warble, too, if you throw a stone near it, the warble being then its note of distress (again like the sedge warbler). **Habits** (like the sedge warbler) : Very restless. **Plumage** : Upper parts *reddish-brown* (sedge warbler *greyish-brown*), a *white* streak between eye and beak (sedge warbler has a *yellowish-white* streak *over* the eye). Under parts (in both birds) pale buff. It must be seen and studied to be recognized and distinguished. **Nest** : (*See* Plate IX) also like the sedge warbler's (*see* Part I, Plate XXIV), and both birds *twine the materials round the reeds, or twigs* if in a bush, for support (characteristic). **Food** : *See* sedge warbler (Part I). **Male and female** : Much alike. **Second nests** : Probably. **Eggs** : *Greenish white, blotched and freckled ashy grey*. Four or five.

12. ROBIN OR ROBIN REDBREAST

(Pages I-II)

Erithaca rubecula. (*Erithaca* ? derivation ; Lat., *rubecula*, red.) *Robin*, a pet name, a familiar form of Robert, Bob or Rob (Lat., *rubus*, red). **Plumage** : Breast and forehead red, most brilliant at nesting time. Not so bright in the **female**, which is also somewhat the smaller. **Upper parts** : Olive-brown. **Under parts** : White. **Legs** : Delicate. **Found** : Generally distributed. **Habits** : Inquisitive, gentle and confiding, but rival cocks fight fiercely, the stronger bird retaining a district (part of a garden, etc.) to himself, and driving out even its own young. **Not migratory**. **Flight** : Weak, short. **Length** : 6 ins. (about). **Note** : A single 'chit' (if alarmed), or a very quick repetition of the same. Also its well-known song, *throughout the year*. Autumn notes more melancholy (to some) than those of the summer (but these notes are thought by some to be produced by the young as yet unskilled cocks). **Food** : Garden and insect pests generally, and worms. **Nest** : In early spring (one of the earliest). *Situated* : Not usually higher than 6 feet, in *all sorts of places* (even in flower pots, cans, etc.) ; but *generally* in a hole in a bank, or in a hedge and in ivy, *well concealed*. Open, cup-shaped. *Made of* : Grass, moss, roots and leaves, and lined with horsehair and some

feathers. **Second nests** : Two or three yearly. **Eggs** : Pale reddish-white, with darker red spots, sometimes most at larger end. Six or seven.

13. ROOK

(Pages 71-86)

Corvus frugilegus. (Lat., *corvus*, a raven ; *frugilegus*, fruit gathering, signification (?) ; Danish, *rock* ; Low German, *rok* ; Swedish, *roka* ; Gaelic, *roc*, to croak, *rocas*, a rook ; Lat., *raucus*, hoarse). A familiar bird of the crow order, totally black, except for a bluish-white patch at base of beak due to the loss of feathers there *after the second moult*, whence **synonym**, the ‘ *white-faced crow*.’ Identical with the carrion crow at a distance in shape, colour and size, but the carrion crow has short stiff hairs at base of beak, and *its habits are different* (see Carrion Crow). Resembles also the very rare raven, but is considerably smaller. **Length of rook**, 18 inches (about). The chough is also a black bird, but has red beak and legs, and is only found on the sea coast in Cornwall, Devonshire, Isle of Man, etc. **Distinguish** also the scarce *hooded crow*, which is larger, and black only on the head, wings and tail, rest of plumage grey (back grey, hence *hooded crow*). **Male and female** : Alike. **Found** : Generally distributed.

Habits : Wary ; when feeding one or two sentinel birds are always posted. Live in communities. **Not migratory.** Leave the rookeries (the nesting trees) with the young after nesting time (June), and then roost together in chosen trees, assembling with much 'cawing,' heard even at night. Return to rookeries in February to March. Visit fields, etc., daily in search of food, to streams, etc., for water, often making long journeys to do so. **Note :** The well known 'cor,' 'kor,' or 'caw.' **Food :** Worms, slugs, grubs, insects, etc., also grain and seeds (frequent newly ploughed fields). **Flesh of young :** Edible. The young squabs are shot in early May. **Nest :** In early spring (February to March), exact time varies according to the season. *Situated :* In the *topmost* branches of the *tallest available* trees (but *elms* favourites, because their top branches are conveniently forked ; there is also no obstruction to their flight in these high branches), in country and town. Open, bowl-shaped (bowl 8 inches across) ; whole nest about 2 feet across, and 18 inches to 2 feet high. (Compare nest of carrion crow, Plate XXI). **Second nests :** Only one brood yearly. Old nests repaired yearly, or new ones built if too much dilapidated. *Made of :* Dried sticks, and lined with dried grass. **Eggs :** Bluish-green, spotted and blotched with greyish-purple and dull brown. Four to six,

14. SAND MARTIN

(Pages 150-153)

Cotile riparia. (Gr. *kotilos*, chattering. (Of the swallow kind. See House Martin). Builds in sandbanks (hence name: Lat., *ripa*, the bank of a stream). One of the swallow family (*Hirundinæ*), and the smallest of the British representatives. (The others are Swift, Swallow and House Martin, which *see*.) Much like a swallow or house martin in shape, and small beak, but **length** only 5 inches, and **plumage**, in upper parts, and a broad band across chest and legs, *mouse brown*; throat, cheeks and under parts, white; and **tail** not much forked and short. General colour when seen on the wing *brown*, and an *impure white*. **Found**: In sandy districts, as it nests in sandbanks—but local. **Habits**: Lives in communities. Fond of the same locality, and returns to same nest year after year. **Migratory**: Arrives about middle of April, leaves about middle of September in large numbers together, and is the earliest to arrive and the first to leave of the swallow family. Some few remain (like swallows and house martins) to the winter, but perish then. **Flight**: Graceful and rapid, but not powerful nor so sweeping as the swift (especially), swallow and house martin. **Note**: Feeble twitters, but shrill ‘shrieks’ if alarmed by nest hunters, hawks, etc. **Food**: Insects (taken near the ground

chiefly, do not fly high like others of the swallow kind over meadows, water, etc. ; fond of dipping in the water. **Male and female :** Much alike. **Nest :** End of May. *Situated :* In the bare perpendicular face of high sandbanks, in a small chamber (about 6 ins. across) at the end of holes, 1, 2 or more feet long, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches wide, excavated horizontally, or sloping slightly upwards out of sandbanks. Many holes together (excavation occupies many days, the birds using their beaks). *Made of :* Hay and dried grasses, and a few feathers, loosely put together. **Second nests :** Two broods yearly. **Eggs :** Pure white (shells thin). Four to six.

15. SPOTTED FLYCATCHER

(Pages 173-178)

Muscicapa grisola. Family *Muscicapidæ* (Lat., flycatchers). *Flycatcher* from its habits and food (see below). (Lat., *musca*, a fly, and *capio*, I seize ; French, *grisoller*, to warble.) *Spotted* to distinguish it from the *Pied* Flycatcher (which is white on the under parts, rare, and found mostly in the north). **Syn. :** Beam, rafter and post bird, and bee-catcher, names derived from its **habits and food**, as it sits on some prominent perch, from which it flies suddenly up every now and then to catch passing insects, *its only food*, in the air, with its **flattened beak**, which closes with an audible

snap, immediately returning to the same perch. A small bird, **length** $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (about). **Plumage** : A brown colour on the back parts, and **beak** brown, under parts a dirty white ; also darker brown spots (whence name) or rather longitudinal streaks on head, sides of neck, upper breast and sides. Recognized easily, as it is almost always seen sitting as described, alone, or with mate at nesting time, on a few chosen perches *in same locality*, in a humped way, and looking dull and impassive, but is very active in catching the insects. **Found** : Fairly distributed, but few in the north. Frequents wooded districts, edges of shrubberies, gardens, orchards, etc. (preferring cultivated parts), and likes the neighbourhood of houses, outhouses, etc. Not shy. **Migratory** : Arrives in early May, and leaves September to October. **Note** : A weak chirrup, but not often. Said also to ' sing ' a few weak notes. **Male and female** : Alike. **Nest** : About end of May. *Situated* : Often near a dwelling house, verandah, outhouse, etc., in shrubs, ivy, trained creepers, trellis, etc. *Same spot often chosen each year*. Open, cup-shaped. **Second nests** : Only one brood yearly. *Made of* : Moss, dried grass and feathers, and lined with horsehair and a few thin roots. **Eggs** : Pale greenish- or bluish-white clouded, blotched and spotted a faded blood colour, (but vary considerably in shades and markings). Five or six.

16. STOCK-DOVE

(Pages 62-67)

Columba ænas. One of the very large Pigeon family (*Columbidæ*, Lat., *columba*, a dove or pigeon). 'Stock' either because once thought to be the stock of the varieties of domestic pigeon (but the rock-dove now thought so), or that it likes to nest in *stocks* of trees (pollard tops, etc.). 'Dove' is variously applied to several kinds of pigeon. A wild pigeon of a greyish-blue tint of **plumage** as seen flying (head, throat and wings greyish-blue). Seen close the *wings* have black marks, the *neck* is green and iridescent, and the *breast* is wine red (whence name *ænas*, Gr. *oinos*, red wine), the *tail* grey barred, black at the end, and *eyes and feet* red. **Distinguish** it from the more common ring-dove or wood-pigeon (which *see*) which is one-third larger (**length** of stock-dove, 14 in., about), and which is blue, but *also very soft light chestnut brown*, as seen from a distance, and has (whence name) a white mark (incomplete ring) on the neck, and *shows white wing feathers in flight* (distinctive), eyes and beak yellow, and legs not so bright red. Both these birds are commonly called wood-pigeons. **Distinguish** also the much smaller and much rarer turtle-dove (which *see*) and also the rock-dove, which is all blue, but has *white rump* (distinctive) and *lives at the seaside and breeds in caverns* (the stock- and

ring-dove are also found sometimes near the sea). The following points are applicable to both the stock-dove and ring-dove (or wood-pigeon). **Habits** : Wary (said to place sentinels when feeding, like the rook), except hen at nesting time if eggs nearly hatched, when she often sits very close. **Not migratory** (but many visit us in winter from the Continent). Both kinds congregate in winter for feeding and inter-associate often in large flocks (visitors increasing their numbers); their **food** is grain and seeds (peas, beans favourites), acorns, berries and turnip tops. Food exclusively vegetable; very voracious. **Flight** : Powerful and very rapid, and capable of being long sustained. Wings flapped together loudly on rising. Run quickly on the ground, with a nodding movement of head (peculiar to all pigeons). **Male and female** : Alike, except female slightly smaller. **Note** : A 'coo, oo, coo, coo, oo,' differing slightly in the two species (must be studied to be distinguished). **Flesh** : Edible. The young 'squabs' best, old birds tough. **Nest** : In early April, sometimes March. *Made of* dried sticks, loosely and carelessly built into a *flat* nest, without lining. Same nesting place often used year after year. **Second nests** : Two or more broods yearly, may nest till autumn. **Eggs** : Glossy white. Two. **Nest of Stock-dove** : *Situated* in holes of trees (*old trees* preferred), old rabbit warrens, (in sandy districts), or in bushes. (Compare ring-

dove, which prefers forks of trees, builds 6 to 8 feet high, but often more ; also in ivy). The eggs may be sometimes cream coloured.

17. SWALLOW

(Pages 140-153)

Hirundo rustica. (Lat., *Hirundo*, a swallow ; *rusticus*, rural, pertaining to the country.) See also (Synopsis) House Martin (especially), Sand Martin, and Swift. It is the second in size of these birds, the order being : (1) Swift (length $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.) ; (2) Swallow (length also $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. but wings and tail not so long as swift's) ; (3) House Martin (length $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.) ; and (4) Sand Martin (length 5 in.). **Found** : Widely distributed. **Migratory** : Arrives beginning of April, leaves September to October. It resembles the house martin, *with which it is usually confounded when seen at a distance*, and also in its habits, flight, note, food and migration ; but differs in **plumage**, *not having the white rump of the house martin*, and front parts are *dull* white and not the pure white of the house martin ; *head* black, forehead and throat chestnut brown, and a black bar across chest. The black in the swallow is of a beautiful brilliant very deep violet tint. It is also more a country bird than the house martin, frequenting chiefly country towns and villages, hence name (*rustica*). It is the house martin that builds the

hanging nests under gutters and eaves in towns. Tail long and much forked (the two outer feathers very long), with a large white spot on each feather. The larger swift is entirely dull sooty brown, almost black, except a greyish white chin, and has a considerably greater expanse of wing. The smaller sand martin is a brown bird, and its nest holes in sandbanks at once distinguish it. Food : Insects only, taken in the air ; vomits undigested food in pellets (like swift and owls). Female : Has not such brilliant colours as the male. Nest : In May. Situated : Inside barns, outhouses, corners of chimneys, etc., and on a support, e.g. a rafter or beam, near the roof. Shape : Like a saucer, or flattened cup. Open. Made of : Clay or mud with straw, and lined with horsehair, dried grass and feathers. In the same locality or spot (like the swift, house martin and sand martin) year after year. Second nests : Two broods yearly, in same nest. Eggs : White, spotted purply red (but vary in the markings). Four to six.

18. SWIFT

(Pages 144-153)

Cypselus apus. (Gr. *kypselos*, the swift ; *apus*, footless, referring to its being incessantly on the wing.) **Syn.** : 'Screecher' or 'Squeaker,' from its occasional shrill note as it sweeps aloft or round a steeple or house in

long, graceful and bold curves, apparently in an ecstasy of delight. Also 'Develin' (a local name in Derbyshire and Yorkshire). The **flight** is very rapid (hence name) and easy, and often very high. It will go far from the nest to find **food**, which is insects exclusively, taken in the air as by its near relations. Flies sometimes after dark. See Swallow, House Martin and Sand Martin (Synopsis), from which the general characteristics of swallow-like birds will be gathered. The swift is the *largest* of these that visit us. **Length** : $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. **Migratory** : Arriving about the end of April or beginning of May, and leaving as early as August or September. A few may remain till October. It is distinguished at once at a distance by its greater size, as compared with the other swallow family, especially in the wide expanse of *wing*. (The wing has aptly been called 'scythe'-shaped when expanded, being narrow and pointed.) Also by its dull sooty black **colour**, uniform except for a small patch under the chin, and its very rapid powerful sweeping flight. They seldom or never perch on the ground, trees, or telegraph wires, and seem never to tire. It is **found** in the country rather than in towns, and is widely distributed. **Nest** : Often in *high* elevations as church towers, steeples, high cliffs or old quarries, but builds also in houses, and is fond of nesting under the thatch of a cottage. Built in May. *Made of* : Careless collection of straw and feathers

on some convenient and suitable platform. Approach to nest is often through a narrow crevice. Returns to nesting spot year after year (like others of the swallow family). **Second nests :** Only one brood yearly. **Male and female** alike. **Eggs :** Pure white, *shells rough*, long *oval* shaped (peculiar). Two or three.

19. TURTLE-DOVE

(*Pages 63-67*)

Turtur communis. (Lat., *Turtur*, a turtle-dove, from its cooing ' tur tur ' like notes, and *communis*, common ; but it is much rarer than the stock-dove and ring-dove, and is **migratory**, arriving in end of April, and leaving in September). See also Stock-dove (Synopsis 16) and Ring-dove (Synopsis 22). Its smaller size and general blackish-brown **plumage** at once distinguish it from the other pigeons, viz., *wings* rusty-red brown, with a black spot on each feather ; besides this its distinctive features are : Some *neck feathers* are black tipped white, *belly* white, *tail* much rounded, dusky brown, white beneath (the white being well seen when the tail is expanded, as just before reaching a perch). **Eyes :** Yellow. **Bill :** Brown. **Habits :** Only a nesting pair seen together, or a few (mostly parents and young) in autumn. **Male and female :** Alike. **Food :** Like other pigeons, grain, peas, beans, etc. **Flight :**

Easy, but not powerful like the other pigeons. **Nest :** In May. *Situated* in trees and bushes, but not high (generally under 20 feet, sometimes as low as 4 feet). Same as that of the stock- and ring-dove (which *see*). **Second nests :** Two broods yearly. **Eggs :** Polished white. Two.

20. WHITETHROAT

(Pages 156-160)

Sylvia cinerea. (Lat., *sylvia*, warbler, *cinerea*—Lat. *cinera*, ashes—from its general ashy (dusky) colour). **Syn. :** 'Nettle creeper,' as it often frequents and sometimes builds in nettles. **Distinguish** the somewhat similar but much rarer, smaller, and locally distributed Lesser Whitethroat. A bird of modest plumage ; *head*, *neck*, grey brown ; *wings*, dark brown ; *tail*, dusky brown ; *two outer feathers* greyish-white (*the white is best seen in flight*) ; *throat*, white (whence name) ; *belly*, white ; *breast*, pale grey tinted rose. **Length:** 5½ inches. Look for the whitethroat especially, in a somewhat flat-headed bird of reddish-brown and greyish-white plumage. Known also by its **habits**. Has an excited manner, especially when singing, and betrays presence by a startled harsh note, which it repeats. Its **song** is uttered in an excited way, the throat being puffed out and the crest erected. It will fly suddenly into the air

singing, and comes down again suddenly to a twig. If disturbed from the nest it drops quietly into the surrounding greenery (some think it will then sometimes simulate being wounded). **Found :** Widely distributed. Is the *commonest of the warblers*. **Migratory :** Arrives early in April, leaves September to October. Some few may remain later. **Food :** Chiefly insects (taken in the air) and caterpillars, beetles, and also ripe fruits. **Male and female :** Alike. **Nest :** In April. *Situated* low, not more than 3 or 4 feet high generally, often in a wild rose bush or other bush, or in brambles and nettles. Open, cup-shaped. *Made of :* Dry grass, wool and lichen (of flimsy structure), lined with horse-hair. **Second nests :** One brood only yearly. **Eggs :** Dull greenish-white, speckled olive green and greenish-grey or light brown. Four or five.

21. WILLOW WREN (OR WARBLER)

(Pages 164-167)

Phylloscopus trochilus. (Gr., *phullon*, leaf ; and *skopos*, watcher. Gr., *trochilos*, wren). Member of Warbler family. Plain **plumage** ; *back* and *wings*, yellowish (or pale olive) green, *under parts* yellowish-white. Distinguished chiffchaff, very similar. (The loud 'chiff chaff' note of this latter bird in early spring cannot be mistaken ; it has been called the 'saw sharpener' from

this note.) Look for a sleek little bird, *length* $4\frac{3}{4}$ to 5 inches, with the above tinted sober plumage. **Found :** Widely distributed. Frequents wooded districts generally (hedges and plantations), also gardens. **Habits :** Not shy, does not fly away into concealment like other warblers. If nest be approached parents become very anxious, but do not fly away far. **Migratory :** Arrives end of March or in early April ; leaves end of September. **Note :** A weak but very sweet and long warbling song (must be heard to be recognized). Sings all the time it stays in this country, except at end of August when it moults, but sings again afterwards before leaving. **Food :** Small insects chiefly. **Male and female :** Alike. **Nest :** In April. *Situated :* On the ground in long grass or weeds, or in a bank, or under a hedge. Of a *regular globe shape* (domed), with a hole at one side for entrance (compare nests of common (jinny) wren and house sparrow) ; neatly constructed. *Made of :* Rootlets and grass (generally), lined with horsehair and feathers. **Second nests :** Doubtful. **Eggs :** Pure white (shell very thin), blotched and spotted reddish-brown. Six or seven.

22. WOOD-PIGEON OR RING-DOVE

(*Pages 59-67*)

Columba palumbus (Lat., *columba* and *palumbus*, two words both meaning dove or pigeon). **Syn. :**

Cushat, queest (local names). The points of distinction between this bird and the stock-dove, with which it is usually confounded, will be found under that bird (see 16, Synopsis). **Found** : Widely distributed. It is the commonest and also the *largest* of the British pigeons, which are in order of size : (1) *Ringdove* (wood-pigeon), the largest, length 17 inches ; (2) *Stock-dove*, 14 inches ; (3) *Rock-dove*, 12½ inches ; and (4) *Turtle-dove*, 11½ inches (approximate lengths). **Plumage** : *Head*, greyish blue ; *neck*, iridescent with a white mark (a so-called but incomplete *ring*, whence name) ; *back* and *wings*, grey or greyish-blue ; *wings*, broadly edged with white, *which shows in flight, distinguishing it at once from the stock-dove*. *Under part*, reddish purple (paler beneath). **Bill** : Orange. **Legs and feet** : Red. Pairs for life, like other pigeons. **Eggs** : Pure white and polished (like all pigeons' eggs, the largest species laying the largest egg).



BIRDS AND THEIR NESTS AND EGGS

Found in and near great
towns

BY
GEORGE H. VOS, B.A., M.B.(Cantab.)

Illustrated by reproductions of photographs
of each bird, its nest and eggs, made by the
author from Nature, and of incidental scenes.

THIRD SERIES



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Preface

THIS Third Part of my book completes the task I set myself, viz., of describing in words and illustrating by photographs 'the birds and their nests and eggs' found near London and similar large towns. The three Parts embody accounts of excursions taken near the Metropolis by myself alone, or in company with my valued naturalist friend, Mr. Alfred Hodgkinson, during three seasons, with limited time at our disposal.

I have found that short word-pictures of the various kinds of birds and the chief points connected with them are a most valuable method of gaining familiarity with our feathered friends. I have included such of all the commonest that we have met with near London, numbering fifty-two, adding short descriptions of some others that may be seen also occasionally. Together with these word-pictures, illustrations may be employed and will add greatly to the result. Nothing can take the place of *finding* the birds themselves, but a previous acquaintance with *good* illustrations of them and their written characteristics is the best way to learn them (and this applies also to the nests and eggs). It will,

however, be found that illustrations, be they ever so good, showing as they do only one position of the birds, will furnish but an imperfect idea of them, as they assume such different appearances in repose to when in flight—though a good illustration (or a well-stuffed bird) will show a characteristic attitude. Their notes, too, though put into words, must be heard to be recognized, for it is very difficult to spell them for all ears. Some birds, however, exhibit characteristics of plumage and note which can never be mistaken for others when once learnt. It is amongst birds of the same or approximately the same size that the most difference *in the plumage* will be found—a few are so large that they will be known at once from description alone.

Conscious as I am of the incompleteness of my work, I know that the criticisms of more matured naturalists than myself, would throw my humble efforts into the shade. Yet I venture to hope that some at all events who are commencing the interesting study of our birds may be assisted by the perusal of these pages—and what can give more interest when out in the fields than to be able to know the birds and all about them ?

CHAPTER I

SOME BIRDS AND A TOWN GARDEN IN EARLY SPRING—SECOND WEEK OF APRIL

EACH day in early spring finds all of us longing for fine if not warm weather. And this is not to be wondered at, for the memory in this London of ours of the cheerless keen winter days, varied occasionally by snow, sleet and the inevitable slush in the streets after it, together with sometimes hours of pitiless rain long remains fresh in our minds. Nor can the days of thick pea-soup like fog which, as some one has put it, 'can be cut up in pieces and handed round' be easily erased from our mental vision. But to-day we rejoice to think that all this is past for this year at all events. November, December, January, February, and even March, those

disagreeable months for the city dweller, are gone. The evening meal, regularly taken at six o'clock is at last no more sat down to by gaslight, the evenings have lengthened out gradually but surely. Each midday we have noticed that the sun has been higher in the heavens and this fact has been to us like the rainbow of promise telling of warmer and finer days now near. The garden has been forsaken the past few months, and except that we have sauntered out occasionally to break the ice upon the little garden pond and to feed the goldfish in it with ants' eggs and to see that they are all right, we have not set foot amongst the flower beds at all. Not even has the sight of the faithful little robin that roosts in the ivy, and has frequented the bushes or come with the sparrows to the window-sill for crumbs, tempted us, and we have been content to observe the busy little tom-tit (blue-tit) that has often shown himself in the may bush or old plum tree, from indoors. But as we stand here now at the window, we feel the warmth of the sun's rays

even through the glass, and love, like the birds and animals, to bask in it. And look! actually, there is a yellow butterfly flitting about, and some bees, too, are coming to the flowering-currant bush.

The garden has not been without flowers, for the eye catches the white snowdrops here and there, but they have faded now. The crocuses, yellow, white and purple, too, are over and are 'in grass'. In their place, however, the beautiful white and blue snow-glories (*chionodoxas*) have been blooming grandly side by side with vernal squills purple and white, and the Siberian squills of fine turquoise blue. But these are passing. White and blue hepaticas are there, however, and the bright shining butter-yellow lesser celandines open out fully as the glorious sun shines on them. The yellow Tenby daffodils are gay and the long-lasting primroses, well established in several shady nooks, keep blooming on—some, indeed, have shown flowers even since Christmas time. It is too early yet for the wind flowers

(anemones) and forget-me-nots. Country friends have just sent us a fine bunch of cowslips—‘peggles’ as they call them there. Wallflowers and the white rock-cress are now bursting into bloom, and the buds of the hyacinths, red and white, planted in the past autumn, are bulging from out their leaves which are already well up. The tulips, too, are showing well. And as the sun is really warm, we will stray out. We are conscious as we do that the wind is still cold, and we hear it whistling mournfully through the telegraph wires, those horrid necessities of civilization, many of which skirt our town garden on one side; it is scarcely time yet to leave our fireside. We have noticed that the goldfish have been very busy of late, and no more lie motionless in the deepest water they can find. And looking into the clear pool, we see that the pond snails are on the move—they have been invisible all the winter past. On the surface of the water are some sweet scented blooms of the winter hawthorn (*aþonogeton distachyon*) that early flowering

hardy water plant, which thrives so well with us. And as we watch, up comes a little black larva, wriggling to the top—the warm sun has matured it. It stays there, floating motionless, but in a few seconds a small cinnamon coloured moth, with prominent white feelers which it waves about, emerges from the case, feels its gauzy wings and flies away. This is a birth very common in the spring-time in all still waters not too deep (and we can see many little empty cases floating about). But it is seldom witnessed by us because we do not watch for it. From the time the larva left the bottom, three feet down, to when the moth flew away, not more than half a minute had elapsed. What a wonderful metamorphosis from life in water to the outer air, and in half a minute's time! What is the fate of suchlike moths? Some are devoured by fish and others by birds. Some live out their little life. The tips of the Mays show green, and the pear trees trained against the wall have burst into white at the warm end on which the sun shines

most. The kingcups by the water's edge (their home) are green in round bold button-like buds, the leaves almost fully expanded. Almond trees are in flower, and so are aucubas and the box, and the cherry is almost so. The yellow scentless jessamine is past, but the delicious scented white one has not yet moved. Horsechestnut buds stand up four inches, looking like huge Christmas trees with many candles upon them. The rough brown leaf buds of the ash are evident. All this proves that spring is here at last, and the birds have not failed to mark the change of season. Starlings have long been busy nesting. In a blackbird's nest which I have seen in a neighbour's garden the young are already hatched. Near by a nest has been observed tended by both a blackbird and a thrush. My informant tells me that the young birds which have been hatched are very peculiar. This was a case of the mating of these two birds, which sometimes occurs.

I have not yet found out where our robins

are building this year. They have started their nest I feel sure. As for the sparrows, they are busy indeed. I stood at the window yesterday, and saw and heard a number of them on the roof of the old outhouse in the yard. There many bits of sticks had collected, and the birds had all at once discovered them, and lost no time in appropriating them for their nests. One bird, a cock, was especially hard working. He and his mate had chosen the top of a pollarded lime some fifty yards away for their nest this year. The sticks were easy to pick up, and I counted his journeys with them to and fro. In five minutes he had performed it twelve times. It seemed to me that, in common with the other sparrows, he had found the sticks to be just what he wanted for his purpose, and in almost distressing haste carried them off bit by bit, grudging each piece the others took away. At last the roof was cleared, and the cock sparrow then spent some minutes in arranging the materials. I saw nothing of the hen meanwhile. Then he popped

down to the pond for a drink (*see* Part II, p. 15) and flew right away.

This happened in the morning, and as I did not see him again that day, he probably had gone to find his food somewhere after his hard work. It all seemed very human to me. In the virginian creeper against the house (*see* Part II, p. 13) a pair of sparrows have been building for the past few weeks with hay and straw and bits of cloth, and the nest does not seem half finished yet. This shows the long time sparrows may take to prepare their home, and it is by no means a small or mean structure. (*See* Part I, pp. 101, 102). Sometimes at daybreak I awake; perhaps it is the sparrows in the ivy (I have known it said that they have been heard to snore!), and I hear just outside my bedroom window a cock's soft, waking, musical notes to his hen. I wonder what he says to her! (The cock sparrow utters a comforting pleased series of notes, too, quite different to its usual chirp, when it joins its fellows or its mates, in the evening,

to roost in creepers or trees.) From half a mile away come the incessant caws of the rooks; they have been busy nesting at the rookery for quite three weeks or more. And judging by the many birds that I see sitting quietly mostly of an afternoon on branches close by—the males I would think—the hens must be patiently sitting upon the eggs. There were seventeen nests in one lot, and I could see almost all occupied by sitting birds, while just seventeen others sat about around, all with their faces to the wind, so as to keep their balance. They seemed as if they were waiting patiently for the first news of hatching from their untiring mates.

I glance at the silver birch. There again is the tom-tit investigating it bit by bit. He is especially fond of this tree in the spring, just as the buds appear, and turns and twists his little body in all attitudes to thoroughly search them out (*see* Part I, p. 34). Our town garden is favoured this year with a pair of wrens, the common jenny wrens. This morning I saw what I took to be the hen

busily and hastily preening her feathers. She sat in the still leafless clematis against the wall, a cosy spot, the sun shining fully on her little body. She had evidently left her eggs for a while, and took the opportunity of hastily performing her toilet. She slipped away quickly but quietly along the wall after this. I must follow up the cue and see if I can find her nest. How fearless town sparrows have become. I saw some of their nests the other day under a railway bridge, a spot certainly in the best of shelter from the elements, but they were subjected each time the trains passed to a cloud of sulphurous smoke and steam, and trains ran each twenty minutes on that line ! It is rather soon to start looking for birds' nests yet, and to continue our Nature notes for this year, but the signs given by some of our early building little feathered friends tell me we must not delay it long, and some birds have even by now laid their eggs. It is well for the little birds that the great Creator has taught them to nest in the spring. For does not this admit

of the young becoming strong by summer time, and so ready for the exigencies of the winter, and in the case of the visitors to our land, for their long migratory flight?

CHAPTER II

AT A HERONRY NEAR LONDON—THIRD WEEK IN APRIL

HERONS no longer afford sport for falconry as they used to do in what we always call the 'good old times.' So they have not been strictly preserved. Guns and ammunition are cheap nowadays, and sportsmen (save the mark !) are numerous. Each winter the taxidermist over the way has told me that he has had some herons brought in to stuff. If by chance an unwary bird in the low lying country not far away, to which they resort for feeding, has offered the great target of its wings and body to the bird-slayer—a mark too large to be easily missed !—the trigger has been unhesitatingly pulled, resulting in the destruction of one more of these beautiful birds. And what for ? To have it, whether a male or female, or even a young bird with

immature plumage, it does not matter—stuffed. And sometimes the bird is left on the hands of the taxidermist, because the destroyer has found the bill for preserving it too big to pay! but the ‘sportsman’ has actually ‘shot a heron’ (not a sparrow or a starling this time!) he tells his friends!

We welcome the kind permission to visit a heronry near London with the camera. No one is allowed to go to the birds unless the keeper be present. So in his company we proceeded to their island home. The first view before us was that of many acres of thickly wooded land intersected by channels affording vistas of water with marshy banks, and aquatic plants from which the croak of a concealed moorhen, or one from a bird paddling busily around in search of food, ever and anon comes, a warning to its kind of the approach of intruders. It was a quiet isolated spot which the heron loves as well as its smaller wading friends.

Careful foresters’ work is done here, as is evidenced by the neat stack of wood and

faggots that attract the eye a few steps from the keeper's door (*see also* Part II, p. 155). The keeper is fond of birds, and has some poultry and dogs too. An old Muscovy duck which had evidently had a recent good meal, sat quietly in the porch of the cottage, taking stock of us and our doings as we put the camera parts together. Behind it a fine brown retriever lay in his kennel with his head out, wistfully looking on and whining every now and then, implying his wish to go with us. But a chain kept him back.

Our path lies through straggling trees and bushes which skirt the water's edge, and we are careful not to tread on the many bluebells (as yet in leaf only) that carpet the sod. It is a short cut to where the punt and boat are kept. The keeper has a careful eye to the oars, which he puts away under lock and key in what was once a grotto built by the water side. It is a quaint old place closed by an ancient rusted wrought-iron gate. The floor of the porch on which we stand before entering is made up of a curious design in round

pebbles arranged at different angles to each other—a heart in the middle enclosed in a diamond, and this again in a square, an octagon surrounding all. Some of the lines making up the pattern were composed of the knuckle bones of deer which once ranged these parts, and which, though fitted into their places many years ago, are still intact, having been imbedded in cement. What the heart signifies is not apparent, and we were referred to some old historical books on the subject. Through the gate we came into what looked like the small chapel of an ancient abbey. It had the usual Gothic windows, and was ivy covered and crumbling. We were assured, however, that it was only another part of the grotto. As we stood waiting for the punt to be got ready, we heard low sounds coming from some thick ivy. The keeper said they were produced by an owl. But though Ted, who had heard them also, climbed up the walls to investigate at the risk of his finger nails (if not of his life), no sign of the bird or the nest could be found.

Inside the chapel-like building, now a boat-house, a water channel had been cut, in which the punt and boat lay. Through this water gate we obtained a view of the lake and the island bird sanctum we had come to see. We noticed here several swallows and house martins, their somewhat unequal size distinguishing them (*see also* Part II, p. 140), flitting busily over the water, picking up perhaps the little moths that hatch in great numbers from larvæ at this time of the year, as before described, and that I had noticed in my pond (*see* Chapter I, p. 5). The birds had arrived only the day before. A few minutes in the punt, leaving the grotto behind us, and we were at the edge of the island. This consisted of a few acres of low lying ground with many trees. As we approached, a black swan paddled up to us in great haste, with ruffled wings and head sharply bent back on his long handsome neck, which he kept rigidly upright in the attitude of attack, his eyes glistening the while. He is a male bird and 'Billy' is his name—'my Bill' the

keeper fondly called him. But though his particular pet he is a vicious bird he tells us, and if we stopped would get into the punt and 'go' for us. Only the oars hold him at a respectful distance. But once when I was not keeping my eyes on him he made a fierce lunge at the black cloth on the camera, and I was afraid he had broken the focussing screen. His mate had died long ago, and no other bird can live with him. He had killed a choice Chinese goose and some other favourites. Though smaller than the ordinary white swans (like our friends of Swan Island, *see* Part I, p. 15), it is probable he would have the best of it in a fight with one of these. And as we go on, he pursues us, exhibiting a remarkable power of paddling (though his round body offered considerable resistance to the water), churning it up into great swirls at his sides, and leaving a considerable wake in his rear. Even the large round now yellowish green water-lily leaves, as yet much below the surface, were agitated as he passed over them. But as

Billy sees we don't want him, and he can't get at us, he gives up the chase, and partakes himself to his accustomed corner in the lake. In front of us is the thickly-wooded low-lying island. Elms and oaks (leafless as yet), and a few firs (which are evergreen) have each their place there. Many large black birds are in evidence. Rooks are by far the most numerous. They have about three hundred nests in the elm tops, their favourite trees (*see* Part II, p. 75), and their many owners are busy, some flying about noisily cawing out their language, all the time protesting probably at our intrusion, whilst others sit quietly on their nests. But several smaller black birds there, too, are jackdaws, their sharp 'clack clack' alone tells us what they are, and the keeper says they are building in holes in the old tree trunks quite close to the rookery. We can see some wild pigeons' nests and also a few of these birds. From under the bank as we approach there skurries in hot haste, which was very amusing to look at, a family of wild ducklings, striving to

get to their mother from whom they had unconsciously strayed many yards. And be-



I: 'The rooks have many nests in the elm tops, their favourite trees.'

yond are sailing quietly along above the trees some much bigger birds than all these. They

are of a grey or slate colour, and have long legs which are kept stretched out behind them as they fly, and long beaks and necks too, the heads being kept well retracted. These are the herons, and the heronry, covering two or three acres, is in the middle of the island beneath them. Sworn enemies are the herons and the rooks, and it is strange that they should build so close to each other, but doubtless the site is very suitable to both kinds of birds, and it is preserved. We hear them evincing their mutual hatred in loud, angry notes when one approaches the other. The nests of the rooks are systematically pulled down by the keeper and his men each year, or the heronry, not the rookery be it noted, would soon cease to exist. This shows how aggressive these birds, though the smaller, are, but it is also in keeping with the markedly solitary habits of the heron. The rooks being so much smaller are naturally swifter and quicker in their movements than the stately herons, and so can turn sharply in the air, and descend upon them hawk like,

inflicting wounds on head or neck. When thus struck the heron utters a pitiful cry,



II : Dead rook, probably killed by herons ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

either of pain or defiance, or perhaps both. But the rook does not always best the herons in these aerial flights, as is evidenced by one

of their number hanging dead upon a tree into which he had fallen, just below a heron's nest, or perhaps the bird had tried to rob a nest of eggs, or was interfering with the young (many of which were now hatched), and received a fatal peck from that dangerous weapon the heron's beak, and doubtless one peck was enough (*see* Part I, p. 71). We left the punt at the bank in the shadow of the numerous trees, and had not gone far when we saw a fledgling heron about eighteen inches tall on the ground right under a nest. Its wing was broken, probably in falling out of the nest, and it was a pitiful sight to see the poor bird trying to get away from us, and toppling over at each step. Its legs seemed too long for it. Near by were the remains of several younger birds, in each case immediately under a nest. In these spots were also many droppings, and several shells of large eggs about two inches long, very conspicuous as they lay there by their size, and especially by their pretty sea-green colour which contrasted sharply with the surrounding

dark coloured dead leaves on the ground. (This colour of egg scarcely supports the theory of egg colouring copying the surroundings for protection; we must find another reason in this case, why Nature has given them this tint.) There were many mussel shells lying about too. We have seen (Part II, p. 32), that herons are fond of these. The keeper easily caught the young bird, and placing it in position I photographed it. But not having a suitable background the result, as usual, is not worth reproducing. A clumsy object it was, as it sat on its doubled up legs, too weak, poor bird, to stand upright. How these fledglings got out of their nests we could not tell, though on looking at some of the nests from below, we saw that their bottoms had fallen out, and let the daylight through. They seemed to have been too carelessly built to support the young. But perhaps that dead rook, and maybe others still alive, and smarting from recent wounds, could have told some tales about the matter.¹ Feeble as

¹ The weather had been very wet and cold, two inches

the bird was, the instinct of self-preservation had not yet left it ; for it made frequent and desperate lunges at us with its beak, uttering weak squawks each time. Despite my warnings to Ted, his nose had a narrow escape from defacement. He picked up the bird, quite an armful, to examine it, when it immediately struck with its beak at the most prominent part of his physiognomy, and just missed it by half an inch. Being held, the bird could not quite reach it. Lucky Ted !—It might have been his eye. There was only one thing to do with the poor dying cripple, and that the keeper did mercifully. It does not seem that the parents here tend the young if they fall to the ground, and they perish there from starvation (the bird just mentioned was miserably thin), if they are too young as yet to fly and get out into the open, or aloft again into the nest, or into the tree tops. This apathy, or cruelty shall we call it, on

of snow had fallen a few days before, and perhaps the birds had perished from cold and the parents had ejected them to make room for a second clutch of eggs.

the part of the parent birds, is probably necessitated by the fact that if the old ones themselves got down on the ground under the trees to their progeny they would not have room to rise on the wing again, being impeded by the tree trunks and their numerous low branches. The long-legged herons are particularly awkward birds when rising on the wing. They have (in common with other birds) to jump off the ground before they can fly, but require plenty of room for this, the expanse of their wings being four feet at least. The heronry consisted of fifty-two nests; the last year there were fifty-six, and the numbers keep diminishing each season, so this bird settlement is doomed to a slow extinction. With the spread of houses near London, and the gradual taking up of open spaces, this is not to be wondered at.

The nests were all in the high forks of oaks (still leafless), except two or three which were in a knot of firs, which are evergreen. These were the only firs there. Herons are particularly fond of these trees, doubtless because

their spreading branches afford a good position for their flat nests and they also here get a good foothold, as they have not a little difficulty in alighting on trees. As we came up, and were still even a hundred yards away, the sitting birds all rose and flew away. Every one of the other birds left too, some quickly, others deliberately. I could not distinguish the males from the females. After focussing, concealed as well as I could without any special facilities, I waited some ten minutes, when a few returned to their nests cautiously, others kept coming back but not venturing to alight. I took a photograph of some of the nests with a one second exposure at $F/32$, using a quick plate, and longed for a lens that would give a larger object. Two birds are seen in Plate III (which is an enlargement) standing on the nest, well outlined against the sky, the only position in which it was worth taking a photograph of the birds, otherwise the confusion of the surrounding branches, and twigs made an all but useless picture.

The flight of the heron is slow, and the

beats of the wings regular. These long-legged birds, as just noticed, have much difficulty in alighting even on the nest, which offers a platform. But when settling on a branch,



III : Nests of herons in oaks. Two birds standing on their nest.

and especially on the thinner ones of tree tops, they experience special difficulty, having to keep poising their wings for even a quarter of a minute sometimes, before feeling

secure enough on their perch to fold them to their sides. On observing this, it struck me as curious that these birds do not nest on the ground. I wonder if they did so originally, and what cause has forced them to build in trees—where their nests are so carelessly made. Perhaps molestation from some ground enemies would be the cause. The glaring sea-green colour of the eggs, too, has to be accounted for. The note is very peculiar and discordant. It reminds one of the ‘crow’ of a pheasant (*see* Part II, p. 156), but is louder and has a peculiar clangy hollowness about it. Close to the heronry, indeed under it, was much stagnant water and morass, and round about it the lake, which contained surface water, occasionally freshened, we were told, from the water company’s mains, and stocked with fish—jack, dace, roach, perch, and some rudd. It was just such another spot as a wild duckery I had visited the year before. As the food of herons consists chiefly of fish, together with frogs, toads, snakes, mussels and water loving creatures

generally (as well as water rats, water voles, and other so-called vermin), it is evident why the birds choose wet places for their breeding spots. Not only is some of the necessary food to hand here for themselves and their numerous progeny (they hatch out two to five young in each nest, and rear two broods yearly), but doubtless the latter get here their first lessons in the art of catching fish. There is a backwater close by, a dark undisturbed spot under trees, the young herons' school we might call it. The trees here were willows, poplars and oaks, many hoary with age, and almost toppling into the water, their roots having loosened in the dark black soil. Through them poured shafts of soft yellowish green, almost ghostly, light, as if through the stained windows of some old cathedral (a very bad light for photography by the way). Overhead and around dozens of rooks' nests had been built. Some were not more than twenty-five feet from the ground, but the birds being on an island, and, moreover, protected, they were not afraid to build

at this, a very low elevation for them. The rooks made plenty of noise in the tree tops, but below them at the surface of the water, all seemed deathly still. The spot was inhabited, however, by a few moorhens and coots, and also by water rats. Some moorhens' nests were there, built, as is usual with them, in a piled up turret-like manner over water, and in one or two places we saw what was certainly, the keeper said, for he had seen the birds there, the commencement of a dab-chick's nest, a floating collection of sticks. An old log, in the foreground, looking, as it lay there, like an Indian dug out canoe, had floated and floated for years, the keeper said, with the rise and fall of the water, and the varying winds, till it had at last found a resting-place in shallow water. The upper surface had decayed by the wet, and dust had accumulated, and leaves had rotted on it furnishing by degrees sufficient soil to maintain some raspberry canes which were flourishing well. Some of the rooks overhead could perhaps have

told how the seeds from which the canes must have grown had got there, helping, perhaps, to explain the specific name of the rook, *frugilegus*, that is 'fruit gathering,' the meaning of which is not apparent as applied to these birds (*see* Part II, synopsis, p. 209). As we punted past the log, a big jack that had its home under its dark shadow, gave a sudden audible rush (as is their wont when disturbed), creating quite a swirl in his wake. Both old and young herons are very voracious. A single bird will commit great havoc amongst the fry of fish. (Judging from the ways of a young heron which Ted has recently kept in his garden, our surmise in Part I, p. 72, as to the eyes and entrails of a jack and some perch we had found having been pecked out by a heron, was correct. For if a fish be given to him, he immediately commences on the eyes, and will devour the entrails greedily.) But the hundred and odd birds here, and their young, could not have got all their needs supplied in these waters, so the old birds make long journeys to marsh

lands, almost always at night, in search of food.¹ And indeed it would not take a heron more than a quarter of an hour to fly ten miles. The long-legged birds stand perfectly motionless in the water for long periods sometimes, until they see their hapless prey, when that fatal strong and pointed beak swiftly strikes with unerring aim (as Ted had almost experienced in his own person). I have watched them thus standing on lonely mountain tarns in North Wales and elsewhere, and if I were fishing at daybreak for salmon or trout, I was sure to come upon one that had not given up feeding yet, always solitary, standing on the river bank watching for fish. More clever than I, too, were they at the gentle art. (But they don't beat *cormorants* at this, I think. I have frequently noted the habits of cormorants *in the sea* round the coast of Guernsey and elsewhere, and in *fresh water* too, in the Welsh lakes and Killarney. Keepers and fishermen well know and detest them.)

Heron's are very wary and difficult of

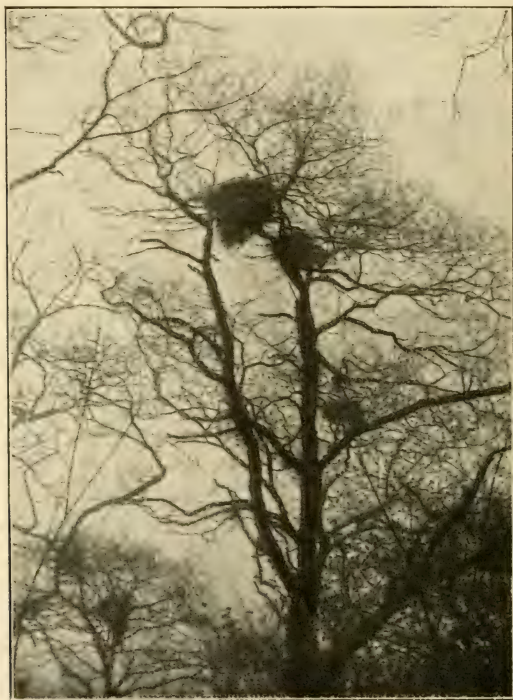
¹ The notes at night, or any other time on the wing, sound like *waank*, *waank*.

approach. I have only on two or three occasions succeeded in getting to within fifty yards of one, though I have often stalked them in this country, as well as in France and Canada. The nest of the heron is a rude structure (*see* Plates III and IV) for a bird's nest. It is merely a large platform-like collection of sticks without any attempt at a regular shape, and unlike the rook's or the carrion crow's (*see* Part II, pp. 69-73) it is much broader than it is deep. It resembles in plan of construction the nest of the pigeon (*see* Part II, p. 59). It is about three or four feet wide, and one foot to eighteen inches in depth, almost flat at the top, with a few pieces of dried grass or wool to receive the eggs. The nests are commenced in March, the first batch of young being hatched by the end of April. The second brood are ready to fly before the end of August, when the old birds commence to leave the heronry, the general exodus taking place at the first touch of frost. But a few return all through the year the keeper told us. The young are fed by the parents

till they can fly. The birds return each season to the same heronry, following the habits of rooks. In some cases the old birds rebuild their nests year after year, and so the structure gets larger and larger. (Mentioning *old birds*, I do not know the exact longevity of herons—or, indeed, of any other bird, at all events not in the wild state. And why are no old herons or any other old birds or animals found dead? One rarely knows or hears of such a thing. The reason is doubtless that immediately a creature of any kind knows that it is going to die it retires into some hole or corner—and Nature has, moreover, provided that its carcass should not lie to decay and be a source of annoyance by its odour—or cause disease by putrefying. It is, in fact, at once devoured. Field voles, shrews, rats, carrion crows and other scavengers immediately set about it, and what is not accomplished by these larger scavengers is completed by beetles and other insects. In summer ants will come and leave the bones bare, and all the time

too a vast army of microscopical organisms, the beneficent species of microbes, are doing their silent and unseen work. Finally the framework of what was once a beautiful living animal or bird is bleached white and left quite pure and sweet by the rays of the sun. After a long time even these bones disintegrate into powder and finally gases, and so the 'dust returns to dust.') I photographed two of the largest of the nests which the keeper said he had known *in the same tree for twenty years* (Plate IV). The nests built by the younger birds could be distinguished, I thought, by their much smaller size and lesser solidity. Indeed, it was from them that the fledglings we had found on the ground seemed to have fallen, for in each case they were directly under such nests. The eggs are four or five in number, and (as before mentioned) of a pretty sea-green colour, *without spots*. They are just two inches in length. Two broods are reared yearly. In *quiet repose* the neck of the heron is bent with the head kept back. In *flight* the head is well

retracted, but the neck is outstretched, and the legs protruded straight out behind,



IV : Nests of herons rebuilt for twenty years in the same trees.

like the moorhen's. But if alarmed, as we saw the birds on their nests, or close by in

the trees, the head is kept as erect as possible, the neck being straight, in an attitude of keen attention, when the bird looks very noble. Observed at close quarters, the eye is seen to be piercing (and it is certainly far seeing), reminding me of that of the bittern, one of which birds I came upon one day suddenly whilst shooting in Guernsey, in which island it was a winter visitor. I was so struck by that beautiful pair of eyes, that transfixed me, the bird being quite as astonished as I was, that I forbore from firing at it, though I was a young and keen sportsman then. I have always been thankful that I did so. The *flight* of the heron has been described as majestic—rather a strong word I think. It is slow, if this can be called majestic; indeed rapidity of movement of the wings is not a necessity for it, as a fully matured bird does not weigh more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ lbs., and the expanse of wing is quite four feet. But at the same time they get through the air at a good rate. The slowness in the movement of the great pinions is deceptive to the eye, the mind thereby deduc-

ing a slow rate of progression. The wings, however, get a good grip of the air, and each stroke drives it well forward. As we saw the birds flying above their nests (they did not soar, but kept their wings moving all the time) they were sharply outlined against the sky, and we could see several feathers missing in the great wings. (And we also noticed that the wings were broad and rounded at the ends.) But this did not seem to impede their flight. (Feathers in moulting are shed *evenly* in each wing, otherwise a bird could not fly straight during this time.) The male in full plumage is a fine fellow, standing three feet high. He has a handsome bluish-black crest, consisting of a few long feathers surmounting a nearly white head and neck. The full length of the crest is not obtained till the third year. It is shorter in the female. In the fledglings it is a very noticeable feature when the youngsters sit up in the nest to be fed. They then erect the fluffy almost white feathers composing it. These feathers are continued down

the neck, and give the youngsters the appearance of North American Indians, bedecked



V: An adult male heron. It stands three feet high.

with all their war feathers, which they wear in this position. These feathers persist, in-

creased in length, on the birds for many months, but change to a blue colour. Ted's young heron, when approached, erected them at the least sign of alarm, or even astonishment; at every passing thought as it were in the bird's brain there was a movement in the crest, and if very frightened they stood up quite straight. This erection of the crest in birds seems to be akin, I think, to the frowning of human beings or the lifting of the muscles of the forehead, expressive of astonishment or fear. The general colour of the wings of the heron is slate-grey, as is well seen when they are folded, but the chief plumes are black. These stand out plainly when seen from below, as they fly. The tail is grey. From the neck many long, loose, dark slate coloured feathers hang down in front of the body, called the 'plume.' They are not acquired till the third year. What use have these? or are they only ornamental? The under parts and thighs are greyish-white, the long legs (which are slender) and toes are greenish-yellow. The male and female are much alike,

the colours in the latter being less bright. A young heron that is moulting into adult



VI: 'A young heron moulting to adult plumage is a sorry object to look at.' Height two feet.

plumage is a sorry object to look at. After nesting time is over (August) few of the birds

are seen at the heronry, as the old and young disperse (like rooks) into the country. But, (unlike their cousins, the storks) they do not leave the country they were born in. When the young are a few weeks old, the whole place is a babel of squawks. When just hatched they keep up a constant feeble chatter, which we heard well on our visit. The old birds are provided with gullets (like the adjutant which I used to eye wonderingly when a boy, sitting on the top of Government House, Calcutta, where they are strictly preserved as very useful scavengers). In these they store the creatures they have captured, and so are able to bring home quantities of them at a time, disgorging them to the young, which seem never satisfied. This would not be possible with the beak alone. As they arrive the fledglings are clamorously noisy to be fed. Not being able always to distinguish their respective parents, the discordant concert is kept up indefinitely. Herons are very nervous at the approach of human beings. Pointing at them, especially, the keeper said,

with a stick, makes them fly off at once. They probably imagine a gun, which they have learnt to dread, is being levelled at them. They keep up a squawk all the night, and if a light be brought towards the nests, the birds become specially uneasy and noisy. This bird sanctum afforded shelter to many wild ducks, mallards, and we saw several of their nests with eggs, with the usual dark-coloured down around them. One hen sat very close, and we admired her as we stood only ten feet away. If she had had a long bill she might easily, I thought, have been mistaken for a woodcock on the nest. The plumage as she sat seemed much like that bird's. Several males were mated with tame females. This is a common occurrence. The business-like long continued notes of the chiff-chaff which we heard, as well as the presence of the swallows and house martins, before mentioned, showed that the yearly migration of our feathered visitors had commenced. Just before leaving we came upon a tree, whose trunk as far as a hole half way up, about three inches

across, was sprinkled on one side with a trail of wood chips and what looked like coarse sawdust. This was the work of a woodpecker preparing its nest hole (*see* Part I, p. 82), and the keeper had seen one of the green species there at work.

I have mentioned that herons feed on frogs and fish. I have watched a frog on the edge of the little pond in my garden lying in wait to jump at flies, or probably any small living creature that came within his reach. (I have seen a frog catch a bee in this manner, and the antics that frog went through for several minutes, and the comic expression of his face whilst the live bee buzzed inside of him before the process of digestion commenced, were laughable in the extreme. Were it possible to reproduce this in a cinematograph in a public hall, it would draw, I am sure.) This frog was imported here as a tadpole two years before. He lived during the summer in the tussock of grass close to where he is seen sitting. On warm sunny days he would take up his position, remaining

immovable, or with only a very occasional change of position to ease his limbs, for hours at a time, a very model of patience, and almost invisible, squatting in the grass, the colours of which he much resembled. Short shrift would poor froggy have had if a heron had come there. (One day, affrighted at my sudden approach, he dived into the pond, swam to the bottom and plunged into some thick silkweed there, hiding himself completely, as he thought, but I could still see his back. I timed his stay under water, and have done so under similar circumstances on other occasions. He remains quiet for about three to five minutes, then straightens himself up for a swim, and has to come to the surface to breathe at the end of the fifth or sixth minute.) The goldfish near him in the water would not be there long either did a heron catch sight of him! Strangely incongruous does this parasitism seem, one creature subsisting on the other. Yet this universal law holds good. The greater preys upon the less, until in the de-

scending scale, we get down to the infinitesimal microbe. And here apparently the sequence is lost, for what creature is smaller ? But are not they, the minutest of living entities known to us, the dire enemies of great man himself, who heads the list, and to whom has been given power over all ! entering, dustborne into his vitals, the cause of many if not all fell diseases, and against which he is often powerless to cope ! And so after all the circle is completed.

CHAPTER III

THE VAGARIES OF OUR CLIMATE—UNPRECEDENTED WEATHER AND NOTES ON SOME BIRDS

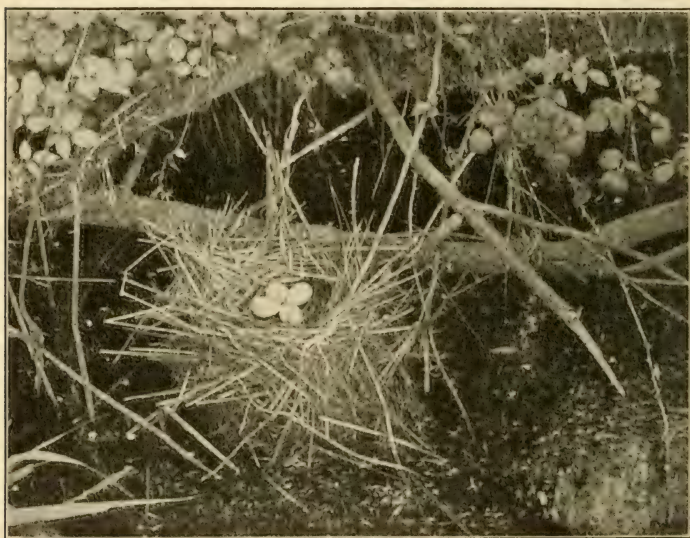
ON looking out of my bedroom window this morning (April 24, 1908), my astonishment was great at seeing everything covered with a deep mantle of snow! Trees and bushes bent low with their unaccustomed burden, a sight that probably no living person had seen so late in the year in London. But the sun gleamed out over it all, the month was true to its reputation. During one of these bursts of sunshine I observed my garden.

The may tree was indeed a strange sight. It is the rendezvous of my sparrows, especially on winter mornings. They sit on the outer twigs, the warmest perch in the garden, getting here all the warmth they can, as

the tree faces south. But this was no place for them to-day! The upper part of the tree was a sheet of snow, whilst the lower dependent branches showed the fresh green of the young leaves. It was curious, too, to see some bright red hyacinths and also golden yellow daffodils showing out glaringly from the white snow. By 12 o'clock the scene had quite changed, the sun having shone brilliantly for two or three hours, and very little snow remained! The snow melting rapidly left the dripping twigs and leaves adorned with myriad drops, which here and there as they caught the sun's rays scintillated like so many diamonds and precious stones of all colours of the rainbow. Strange to say a sparrow's nest built in a dead plum tree which had caught the snow heavily remained for nearly the whole day like a round white beacon against a dark wall beyond it. I thought of how the poor herons high up on those tree tops (*see* Chap. II) must have felt this severe weather, and how badly the poor little fledglings in those flat

exposed nests must have fared. Their condition, however, was much mitigated by the fact that there was no wind, and when the sun shone the air felt quite warm. Ted had been round some old haunts and found many birds building, but several nests had been deserted, doubtless on account of the cold. I got a fine photo of a moorhen's nest in a ditch the other day with four eggs. (See Moorhen, Part I, pp. 109-11.) It was remarkably well placed for a photograph, and was so striking a picture that I reproduce it here (Plate VII). Each stick of the nest is plainly seen. There was no attempt at concealment. I came suddenly on one of the birds. It dived under the weeds that covered almost every inch of the *perfectly still* surface of the ditch, and I wondered when and how far off the bird would come to the top. It was almost by chance that I caught sight of it again. It rose in about a quarter of a minute a few yards away. Watching intently I noticed the water *slightly* disturbed there. But only its beak and a small part of its head were visible.

The red at the base of the beak specially attracted my attention. (Why is the beak red here?) I again disturbed it, and the bird this time disappeared *entirely*. Moor-



VII: 'Each stick of the nest is plainly seen.' Nest of moorhen with eggs ($\frac{1}{8}$ size).

hens will escape in this manner from the very best of water dogs.

I had many opportunities of watching the faithful connubial attachment of the pair

of sparrows in my garden that built in the dead plum tree just mentioned, and their daily busy search for pieces of hay, straw, paper, etc., as additions to their home. As soon as the evening shadows began to fall the pair would come to a may tree close by, and chirp and wag their tails to one another as if quite pleased with their day's work. Both of them occupied the nest before and after the eggs were laid at night time. For at dusk, if I tapped on the tree trunk they would *both* fly out. I took a photograph one evening of the nest, with the cock-bird near it, just as the setting sun rounded the corner of the house close by. They laid again in the same nest in about six weeks after rearing the first brood.

CHAPTER IV

A LONG DAY WITH THE BIRDS IN THE NORTH OF KENT, BY THE RIVER THAMES—THIRD WEEK IN MAY

KENT is called the Garden of England, and indeed in the month of May especially it well merits the name. Gardens then are even its waysides, and needing no touch of the hand of man. But it is a noted bird-land too, not only in May but throughout the summer, as its shores which are only some twenty miles from the French coast across the English Channel are the first haven that the feathered immigrants make, when, after winter, softer winds blow from the south-east and south, and urge them on their way. Ted and I were fortunate to be able to spend some hours there this month, when all nature was in its best trim, and the newly arrived birds

had built and were singing their nesting songs. Strangely varied are the scenes that meet the eye as the train whirls you eastward from the great metropolis along the Thames. Thousands of flat acres skirt its banks on the north side, dotted with innumerable sheep, cattle and horses at this time of the year. Now, great gasometers are borne upon one, gaunt chimneys and black hulls of ships, forests of masts and variously coloured funnels of great ocean-going steamers or the smaller tugs. The nose is assailed with the smell of pitch and oil, whilst the sound of many hammers tells of incessant toil. Then the train bursts into the neat little railway station with its trees and plot of cultivated ground, the name spelt out neatly and distinctly amongst the flower beds in white lumps of chalk. In the middle distance the water highway from the greatest city in the world flows swiftly along with the outgoing tide, reflecting the sun here and there, in silver streaks, or the clouds by leaden hues. There rolls up from the river now and then the

hoot of steam sirens, muffled by distance, as the great ocean-going steamers carefully make out their way down stream, for the horizon looms quite hazy to-day—a by no means uncommon occurrence here, however. And behind all to the south rise the fair hills of Kent, whither we are bound. The river crossed we are fairly in the country, as was evidenced by the carefully kept golf links close by. The flats that we had traversed were birdless save for a few rooks, carrion crows and starlings that had quitted their nests far away to get food for themselves and their ever-hungry young families. But here feathered life was much more abundant. The first birds that attracted our attention and astonished us by their unwonted appearance, and that they were there at all, was a company of a dozen or so of the hooded or grey-backed crows. They are larger and broader than rooks, or even carrion crows, and clumsier in their ways and heavier in flight. We at once distinguished them by their grey backs (from which they get their

name) which are very apparent as one sees them feeding like their near black relatives amongst the droppings in the fields. We were told they nested here, and we would have been glad to have made a closer acquaintance with them, but our destination was further on. These birds are scarce, and certainly so in Kent hereabouts. Though found in many parts of the British Isles and chiefly near the sea in the north, they are, nevertheless, locally distributed. Their length is about twenty inches. The tail, wings, head and throat are black, whilst the back (as before noted) and lower part of the neck, and wings, and under parts are all grey. So that their specific name of '*Grey-backed*' is not comprehensive enough to fully describe their plumage. The beak, toes, and legs are shiny black. They are almost always found near tidal rivers and the sea-shore. Those found in the British Isles are partly migratory, some (like those we had seen) coming southwards in the spring at the nesting time, to return north again in the autumn (October).

Many visit us from the north of Europe, several not getting farther inland than our lowland eastern shores. If reference be made to the carrion crow (of which bird some say it is merely a variety, and interbreeding occasionally) (Part II, pp. 68-74), the description there given of their food (including nest robbing and mussel eating) and general characteristics, even to the strong beak with bristles at the base, will describe also the grey-backed crow. It is in the plumage and somewhat larger size that the differences are found. Unlike them, however, they generally feed in flocks though they nest in separate pairs—as do the carrion crows—and not in communities like rooks. I do not know if they remain mated for life. Some of their other names are, the hoodie, or hoody (the name most used), and dun and grey crow—the meanings of which are apparent. They are also called royston and bunting crows, why I do not know, and other names also. Hoodies build in much the same position as do carrion

crows, and the nests are almost alike. The eggs, too, are very similar, being about two inches long, and of a light greenish ground colour mottled greenish-brown all over. Four to six are laid. I do not think they have more than one brood yearly. They nest in early spring. The female is somewhat the smaller bird and her grey parts are tinged with brown. Hoodies are even more wary than carrion crows and rooks, posting sentinels as they do when feeding.

* * * *

Then we passed little villages of brown brick blending harmoniously in the landscape with the soft and the bright greens of spring all around. Each village was located by its little church, many of whose spires were castellated, as were also some of the quaint old buildings hereabouts. This was already the country of the far-famed orchards, and their positions were evidenced by the clean pink and white apple blossom, now fully out. There would be a glut of all kinds of fruit this year it was thought, as the season was

late, so that cold winds and frost had not played havoc with the blossom. More flats, more villages and hills in the distance, and then the foreground filled up with plots well broken by the plough, intersected by many dykes, most of which were now covered with the myriad little white flowers of the water buttercup. And now to the nests. We had marked out a round for the day. On starting we could see far ahead several dozen seagulls feeding in a recently-ploughed field, their white bodies contrasting sharply with the dark soil. Our first steps were through a field of corn as yet only a foot high, a pathway being left through it diagonally as a short cut. Many skylarks were at home here, singing their joyous carols. Their nests are hard to find. The presence of a bird singing over any given spot does not mean that a nest is *just* there, for they are artful birds. They alight some distance from the nest and run to it. A favourite way with boys is to find the nests by dragging a piece of string across a field and so disturbing any sitting

birds. But this if done in a field ripening for hay would very probably end in a right-



VIII : Nest of skylark ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

ful prosecution by the owner, if the trespassers were caught. Plate VIII shows a

nest which Ted found. It contained four eggs of a light greenish-brown colour, marked all over with close lines and marks of darker brown. The joyous song of the bird on the wing is often kept up for half an hour or even more at a time. Who has not heard the lark sing? The notes are heard even in winter (like those of the blackbird and thrush) if the weather be mild. But the bird is in *full* song all through the nesting season. It is a painful sight to see a skylark cooped up in a little wooden cage made with a round front like a bay window, in which *one small* sod of grass is placed for the bird! Even then, however, it will sing, fluttering its wings the while, trying to imagine itself soaring up above the sunlit fields! The bird is prolific, laying four or five eggs each clutch, and nesting two or three times each season, from the month of April onwards. A skylark's nest is a thing to look for right through the summer. Though large numbers of the birds are eaten (and I must admit they are a delicacy) we still meet with them almost

everywhere we go. They are found all over the Continent. The nest is always built on the ground—one may say anywhere, but mostly in tall grass. It is in a slight hollow,



IX : Skylark ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

and made of thin roots and hay. The female is somewhat smaller than the male, but is otherwise the same.

Skylarks assemble in flocks in the autumn. The cold drives many of them to migrate, but

some remain. Many come to us in the winter from the Continent. The food is chiefly insects, seeds, and worms. They find it mostly on the ground. The colour of the plumage is brown of lighter and darker shades, the general colour as seen in the fields being *sandy* brown. Its flight when not soaring to sing is dipping. The under parts are yellowish white, tinged with brown. There is a white mark over the eye. The throat and upper part of the body in front are spotted dark brown.

Then we pursued our way along a hedged road that sloped down into a valley beyond, rising soon again. On the right of this road were many sand martins flitting low across the field in search of insects as is their way, and not far off was their home, a small neat quarry in the soft yet well-packed yellowish sandy soil. The interior formed a bare-faced perpendicular cutting from which the gravel had been taken, corn growing right up to the extreme edge. The birds had tunnelled this with many holes, the nature of the sand

being just suitable for the purpose, not too hard for their beaks to work in, and yet not soft enough to collapse. The holes were all fresh this season, a labourer told us, as the last year's ones had been quarried out during the winter. Plate X shows a near view of the quarry. The tunnels were, as usual, out of reach, but from a sloping field on one side I was able to get good photographs at just the proper elevation. The *large* holes seen in the Plate, one with a root projecting, are rabbit burrows. There was no chance of getting any of the birds to remain quiet enough for even a snapshot of them, as they kept coming out of their holes off their nests, disturbed by us as we approached, almost as if shot from a catapult, and on re-entering did so unhesitatingly, reaching unerringly their own particular hole each time, and not stopping in their flight till they were well in it. Sand martins have been described in Part II, pp. 150-2.

Leaving this interesting colony of some fifty birds, we proceeded down the lane,

when whirr-rr, out flew a *hen red-legged* partridge from the bank on the left. She had risen from her eggs and we easily found the nest, having marked the spot she left.



X : Nest holes of sand martins in a quarry.

It measured about fifteen inches across and contained seven eggs of a stone colour mottled all over irregularly and thickly with small pale maroon coloured specks. It was in a

shallow natural hole, or one begun by rabbits, or one, at all events, only partly scooped out

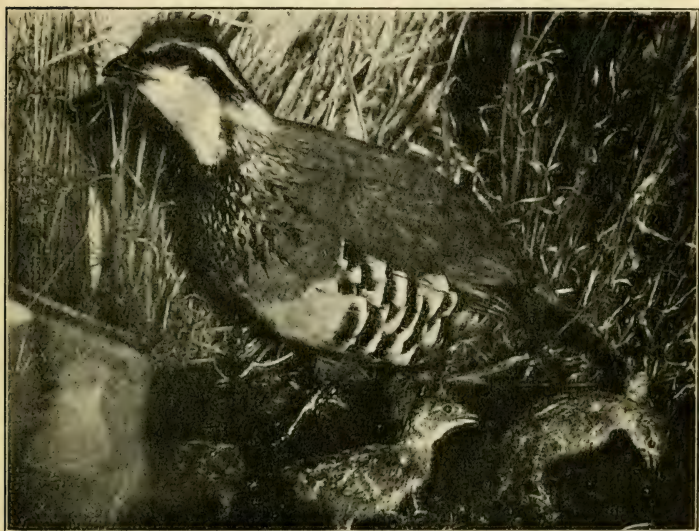


XI: Nest of red-legged (French) partridge with eggs
($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

by the birds. It was made of loose bits of hay and grass, with a very scanty lining of

short odd bits put in at random it seemed. It was about eight feet from the ground in the almost vertical banked up hedge, and was thus very difficult to get at with a camera. But by the aid of a field gate near by which in these parts, conveniently for us, were made to take out of their sockets in posts at each side, I was able by placing it with Ted's help against the bank, to get high enough to focus properly after fixing in position the three legs of the camera stand, which required considerable manœuvring before they would come right and steady. We of course carefully replaced the gate. There are two distinct kinds of partridges in the British Isles, known especially to sportsmen as the English or '*nut brown*' and the French or *red-legged*. The English partridge is so called because it is the one indigenous to this country. The French red-legged kind having been introduced many years ago. The French kind is not liked by sportsmen so well as the English as it does not rise well like the English bird, but runs on the

ground, and so does not afford good sport. If it can be 'got up,' however, by the dogs, or walked up, it flies more rapidly and more strongly than its cousin—and makes more



XII: Hen French (red-legged) Partridge and two chicks ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

noise with its wings—the difference being quite evident to the experienced sportsman, though he may not have seen the bird. If *suddenly* come upon (which is unusual, as

they are very wary) they get away very quickly. Their running habits are a great nuisance, as much time is wasted in putting the dogs on to find them. They will run long distances, especially in ditches on the sides of fields, if not too much wounded (one wing only broken, for instance), and thus often elude even the best of dogs, which sometimes have to be whistled back from the chase. Neither is their flesh so tender or so toothsome as that of their English cousins. Then also the French species is aggressive and ousts the English, which is undesirable. It requires only a slight acquaintance with the birds to be able to distinguish them. The red legs and general red colour of the French bird are seen at once, and they are the larger and brighter-coloured birds. The shape is different. The call of the English partridge is said to imitate the word 'coki-leek,' but the 'Frenchman's' as sportsmen call them, can be distinguished with practice. I have heard the sounds very closely imitated.

Partridges are fond of open, cultivated

country, flat or hilly, but prefer the latter. In winter, as the sportsman knows, they go on to stubbles to feed in the afternoon. Their first meal is taken in the morning. Corn being nowadays cut by machinery it does not leave the cover for them that the old method of hand cutting used to do, nor is the same amount of wheat grains left in it. Poor women used once to be allowed to glean what they could after the corn was cut, but nowadays there is little to glean—and little for the birds. Partridges are very fond of clover and sainfoin. On September 1, the date on which their shooting opens, these are the places to find the English variety. They lie close here and afford good sport. When flushed from this (or other) cover they will often go into corn if it be at hand and still standing. Here they are safe for the time, as it would be disastrous to the wheat to follow them in it. If some stubble be left high on purpose, some of the birds will be sure to be found in it. They also like the cover afforded by turnips and mangold wurzels, etc., and de-

light in getting into a patch of standing beans. The flight of the birds is very characteristic. It is always low, and the wings are moved very rapidly and then suddenly stopped for a while, when they skim long distances with the wings outstretched and motionless. When the birds have been shot at even once or twice, they get very wild, and have to be driven and waited for, this being the only way they can then be got at all. A cold and wet season at nesting time kills off large quantities of young birds, so that the sport obtained in September and after, depends much on the weather of the earlier part of the year. The coveys break up and both species pair at the end of February or beginning of March, nest in April to May, and the young are strong on the wing by the end of July. From ten to fifteen or more eggs are laid.

The young of the English birds keep together and are found in coveys. Twenty is a *good* covey. The mother takes the care of the brood. The smaller size and feebler

flight of the young birds at once distinguishes them from the old ones. When 'walked up' to be shot, all the birds of a covey rise almost all at once. French partridges breed in the same way, but they do not rise in coveys. The nests of both kinds are made on the ground in some convenient spot in fields or at the bottom of hedges. Both species lay approximately the same number of eggs. The eggs of the *French* bird are yellowish white, with a reddish tinge, and have brownish-red spots and specks. Those of the *English* bird are yellowish with a tint of greenish brown *without any spots*. The call of the English cock bird is very melancholy. It sounds to my ear like a 'too-dle-oo' from a wooden wind instrument. If the cock bird gets separated from the covey or the hen, he will call for a long time till he finds them. If well imitated and the caller keeps quite still, the bird can be deceived and made to approach the watcher. The males fight fiercely with each other in the breeding season. Partridges are about twelve

to thirteen inches in length, the French species being the larger as already noted. The English birds have a curious way of roosting in the open in a bunch, *all facing outwards*. This renders them a prey to poachers, who net them at night time. But this may be prevented by sticking branches in the ground here and there which catch the nets. These branches are a familiar sight in fields in game country. Many partridges kill themselves by flying against telegraph wires. I have heard it said that a bird has been known to fly right through a moving train crosswise between the carriages without injury! I do not believe the story that a bird has been seen to fly right through a train from the engine to the last carriage! The food of partridges is insects (beetles, caterpillars, etc.), and worms, and also wheat, beans, and probably any berries and seeds. They are also very fond of ants' eggs—and devour snails and grubs, for which they scratch in the earth. They delight in a dust bath like domestic hens, sparrows, and some other

birds. The general tint of the English bird is brown—nut brown—and grey, the male being distinguished by a chestnut coloured horse-shoe shaped patch on the lower part of the breast. The French bird is more variously coloured and of a general reddish and brighter tint of plumage, and red is also the colour of the beak, legs, and toes. The male partridge has a knob on the leg where the spur is in the domestic fowl, and this distinguishes him from the hen, and the colours of the latter also are not so bright. If a partridge receives a shot in the head it may fly on for some distance, but losing control apparently of the power of moving *forwards* it mounts rapidly *upwards* into the air and falls down dead. So that (and even in any case) if a bird is thought to have been hit, it is watched carefully.

* * * *

We got into a narrow, high-banked lane, which sloped down to an apple orchard and a farm beyond. The lane made a pretty picture. Some elms met overhead to form

an archway, whilst the banks were covered with sheets of small white flowers. To add to the effect, a picturesque old son of toil came up with a horse and cart, and I regretted the fact that no camera could snapshot the group, as it was too dark under the trees. The word 'toil' set me thinking of how birds have to work. They *all* have to *find* their daily food and drink somehow—somewhere, and this is not done often without many long journeys on the wing. And then at nesting-time, think of the long days of nest-building. The materials have to be *found*, carefully selected and carried bit by bit, and bit by bit it has to be fitted and worked into the neat nest that excites our wonder and admiration. And then come the many patient days of incubation. And as soon as the young family arrives the work multiplies into the feeding of four, five, six, or more youngsters that are hungry from the first shimmer of morning to the last flicker of daylight. And they require to be fed for many weeks. What journeys to and fro

the parents make for them ; and what distances many have to travel, and what searching to find just the proper delicate morsels suitable for their young progeny, and doubtless, too, much bird anxiety to get *enough* for all. We can imagine how tired the parents must be at the end of the day. And how dishevelled their feathers become, the hen especially showing this. And the whole has in some cases to be gone through again, and even for a third time each season. And when the summer is ended and the lowering temperature, the falling leaves, and failing food tell the birds that they must quit the scenes of their toil, comes, in the case of the migrants, the long and dangerous flight across the sea, in cold and wet or changing wind, may be, or sudden fog, and many a still further mile when land is found again, until a warmer clime is reached. And here again they have to *seek* their daily food. Is it a wonder that the limit of *small* bird-life is as estimated, I believe, only three or four years ! and that a very large percentage, even

seventy-five per cent. perish, and many of them at sea! Our little feathered friends are not born with 'silver spoons in their mouths!'

The lane led us to low, marshy ground. Here we found a mother mallard busy feeding her young family. The old bird scurried out of the reeds into meadow grass as we came near, in an anxious, dashing way, not rising on the wing, as she would undoubtedly have done had she been without her little charges. Her peculiar flurried behaviour when with the brood cannot be mistaken, though *you* may not know they are there. The ducklings if much disturbed will scuttle from cover, a hurrying waddling group, going at a great pace after their mother, but scattering helter-skelter in all directions. But they will all meet again very soon, the mother telling her whereabouts by subdued little quacks which are quickly heard and recognized by the frightened youngsters.

And here or near by you will find the happy family most probably again on the morrow,

dibbling and dabbling in the mud, or swimming about in the reeds in their pretty little way. The manner in which a duck suddenly frightened can conceal itself was well illustrated just after this. We came all at once upon one of them in a narrow ditch of open water without reeds or weeds of any kind on the surface. It dived at once, and we never saw it again, though we waited quite five minutes, expecting to see it reappear. Nor was the water ruffled anywhere, though it was not more than two feet deep. The bird dives at once to the bottom, and gets away cleverly along it, leaving no traces of its whereabouts except perhaps a few tell-tale bubbles in the direction in which it has gone, which are caused by the gases it has disturbed from the bottom rising to the surface. The bird does not come to the top till many yards away, and then rises under a clump of weeds or in reeds (like moorhen, p. 49), and is thus quite lost to view, and so baffles pursuit. How long a duck or a moorhen can remain under water I do not know.

On the edge of a dyke some pure white starworts grew together with many horse-tails. How often one comes across such pretty little bits.

As I was taking a photograph a bird flew out of the greenery with a great flapping of its wings. We just caught sight of it. It was a cuckoo that was taking a midday siesta in the cool shade of the may and blackthorn overhead, or had come down from the hills for a drink. Its mode of flight, its general dusky plumage and long tail (though I did not see its barred breast (*see* Part I, p. 77), were unmistakable. Before we left the flats Ted found the nest of a long-tailed tit made of lichen, as usual, but at a very uncommon elevation and position for this bird. It was only two feet from the ground, in a low blackthorn bush, at the edge of a ditch and *hanging over water* ! I could easily get at it for a photograph, and the sun was well placed to one side. It contained a great quantity of small soft feathers in which lay more than a dozen of the small eggs (*see*

Part I, p. 120). It was about the shape and size of a cocoanut, a natty nest. It is at all times a very striking structure. I have always wondered how such a small bird as the long-tailed tit can cover and keep warm to hatching such a large number of eggs. The entrance hole, a single one in this instance (*see* Part I, p. 86) was, as usual, near the top. (I photographed this nest when the young birds had flown, not wishing to disturb them on the first occasion. *See* p. 152.)

The hill now engaged our attention. The day was hot and the air still, and many insects and some butterflies were about. Blue-bottles whizzed past us as is their way in broiling sunshine. I kept a look-out for grass snakes, in the cracks of the earth, in which they like to bask in the sun, but did not see any. They often come out on hot days and lie on the top of furze and other bushes. I have seen them sunning themselves thus in Epping Forest. Not heeding the heat nor the weight of the camera and kit, we were soon at the top of the hill. From here we ob-

tained a glorious view. Wooded and ploughed slopes spread away for fifteen or twenty miles all tending gradually towards the plateau which we had left. Two or three of the now disappearing old windmills dotted the horizon line, placed thus high to catch the wind. On the top of one many jackdaws' nests had been made. Some hop kilns, too (relics of a departing (?) industry) were visible. The large steamers on the Thames were much dwarfed now by distance, but their hooters were still just audible, booming up over the extensive marshlands. The part on which we stood was called Blackberry Hill, because this fruit was once cultivated here with great success, on the warm hillsides that faced west and south. The bushes had been planted in isolated clumps to permit of the fruit being picked, but were not now tended. Behind was a large dense wood, into which many rabbits and a few hares had disappeared on our approach. This spot, quiet and secluded but only one of many like it, was, of course, an ideal place for nests.

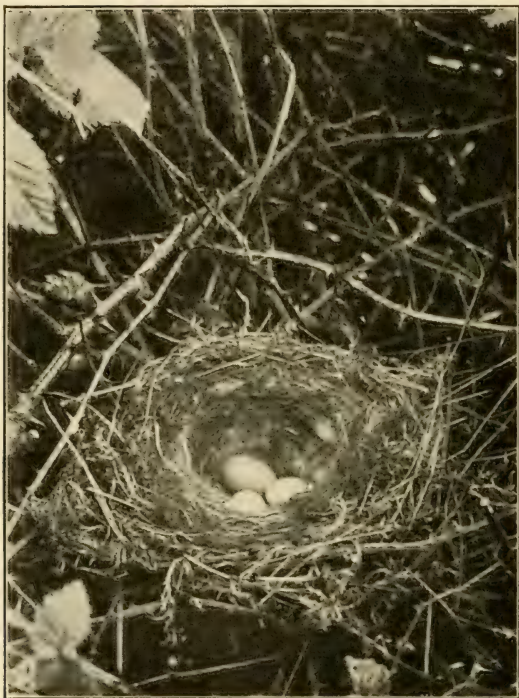
From the foot of the path we had ascended we could still hear continued troubled notes—the beautiful song of a disturbed sedge-warbler, which had commenced to sing as we passed, a sign that its nest was near (*see* Part I, pp. 59-63). We had made a hasty search for it without success—they are always well concealed. Never, I thought, had I seen the may so white, nor the bluebells so blue! The weather had been cold, but a few days of sunshine had stimulated all Nature, and, blossoms had opened quickly, fresh and strong and clean, and leaves were of that crispness which is lost when they are fully out. The birds, too, had been spurred to work. The low blackberry bushes contained many nests. Being so low and the clumps easily got at all round, the nests in them were particularly well situated for photography. From the spinny came the warning ‘crawk’ of a cock pheasant, and now and then one of his hens kept flying from the open to his protecting care. Cuckoos seemed everywhere—their notes were almost con-

tinuous. And there were blackbirds galore.

They are a plague at fruit-time in this neighbourhood (*see* Part II, pp. 94-100), and are mercilessly destroyed. A nest is always 'pulled' if found. (I knew of a nest here in which seventeen eggs were laid in one season, in two clutches of six each and one of five.) But when the many acres of blackberries became ripe there would be more than enough for all of them and other birds too, as well as for whole schools of children let loose amongst them. I heard for the first time what I thought might be the peculiar note of the cuckoo, said by some to be uttered by the hen with an egg in its mouth seeking some other bird's nest wherein to lay it (*see* Part I, p. 78). The first syllable of the familiar cry was clear—'Cuck'—but the usual well-sounded 'oo' was replaced by an imperfect and somewhat muffled 'cull-oo.' This 'cuck-cull-oo' was repeated many times, so that there was no doubt about it. These notes may, however, have been made by an amorous *male* bird, and I am more inclined

to think this than to hold the other theory. The male often utters a 'cuck, cuck, cuck' when making love to the female. The hedge-sparrow's nest is one of the commonest in which the cuckoo hen lays its eggs, one in each nest, a habit the reason for which is as yet unexplained by naturalists. As luck would have it, the very first nest we found in the blackberries illustrated this (see Plate XIII). The larger cuckoo's dark brown spotted eggs contrasted strongly with the two clear blue spotless and smaller ones of the hedge-sparrow.¹

¹ Some very interesting details about the cuckoo appeared in a number of the *Country Side* for June, 1908. One of these birds was observed by a reliable authority, who was only at the time a short distance away, to go to the nest of a hedge-sparrow, take out one of its eggs and devour it. This was done again. The cuckoo was then seen to take her own egg of a dark colour, which she had apparently laid on the grass during a stay there of a quarter of an hour after the robbery, and place it in the nest *with her beak*, where it was handled and was quite warm, the other eggs being cold. This settles two questions that have always been in dispute as to the cuckoo *eating* other birds' eggs and that it deposits her eggs in the nest *with her beak* and not with the foot as some have averred.



XIII : A cuckoo's egg in the nest of a hedgesparrow, with two eggs of the latter ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

The next nest I photographed was that of a linnet, also in a low blackberry bush. It contained four eggs of the usual bluish white colour marked mostly at the larger end with

light reddish-brown and purplish red spots. Close to this nest was also another linnet's,



XIV : Nest of linnet with eggs ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

but the eggs in it had each only one or two (not more) of the minutest red specks, a variation which is common, and some are

quite white without any spots whatever. The linnet is a familiar bird to most people. I have one, a cock, which I bought for eightpence twelve years ago, and it sings as well to-day as it did when I first bought it a newly-caught youngster. Its song is always enjoyable, not so noisy as a canary's and more varied. I mentioned just now that the average life of a small *wild* bird is three years—I have had my linnet twelve years and it shows no signs of decay or old age, and I could not say how long it may continue to live and thrive. Now this is a great argument in favour of keeping a bird in captivity. If *at least* nine extra years of life can be given a bird by catching and caging it, caging it is not cruel. It gets its food and drink and bath regularly and without any difficulty summer and winter alike, and has not to go far to find them, as I before mentioned most wild birds have to do. It is not nearly frozen to death in the winter. It is not threatened by bird-catchers, hawks, cats, and other enemies, and suffers no

anxieties of any kind. It seems perfectly happy, singing at all seasons, but mostly in the spring (like other birds). It is, however, denied the joys attendant on mating and building a nest each year, and the society of its fellows. What could be said to the foregoing arguments? The only thing would seem to be that the bird is prevented from propagating its species.

The linnet is noted for variety: (1) in its plumage; (2) in the colour of its eggs, and (3) in the notes of its song. A typical *wild* cock linnet has a crimson forehead and crown, grey head, rich chestnut upper parts and a beautiful carmine breast. (These colours are never attained to the full in captivity, the birds becoming of a more uniform brown tint.) The colours of the hen bird are duller and without crimson. But the plumage varies much—one variety has a lemon yellow breast, and there are other variations. (The so-called *green* linnet is another name for the greenfinch (see pp. 154-5) a totally different bird.)

I have mentioned the differences in the

eggs—as to the song notes, they are variable indeed. I will endeavour to put into words the song of my caged bird, to which I have listened many times. It is impossible to describe it properly, and it never seems the same each time, either the commencement or the end differs. The bird often seems to say : ‘tootch-oh-twee,’ or ‘tootch-oh-twee-twee’ pronounced as we would say, ‘Told you so, d’ye see?’ Sometimes it says, ‘tchitch-er’ twice repeated, before bursting into its song, uttered in the tone of as a child would say ‘Get up gee gee.’ It seems to have an antipathy for my parlour-maid, who has frightened it in some way, or perhaps her white apron offends it. It scolds her very often as she comes into the room, with a hissing chirr—rr chirr, ‘rr,’ or ‘tschee, tschee,’ and sometimes with ‘sh’ as pronounced in the word ‘hush.’ Its song is sometimes like, ‘Did ’em like the gee gee’ (‘gee, gee’ slower), ‘sweet, sweet, sweet,’ as if said to a child, and also, ‘little pee-ee-wit’ (‘pee’ very high), besides many other continued phrases which I cannot

attempt to spell. These notes are very different to those of a canary. Nor does it sing so noisily. As has often been remarked, we find that the bird with the soberest plumage has the finest song, the nightingale being the example best known to us in this country. Linnets are especially fond of furze to nest in. The nest is open and cup-shaped and built of twigs, grass and moss, with down of seeds, horsehair and wool. Four or five eggs, sometimes six, are laid, and three broods, or even four, are raised each year, the first about the end of April. The nests are not built high. Linnets are fond of keeping together, several may be found in a flock even during the breeding season, but in winter the flocks are large and may associate with flocks of chaffinches and greenfinches, etc. The birds are widely distributed over the British Isles. Though some may be found in very varying localities almost all through the year, the great number go south in October, and some migrate then, whilst many come to us in flocks from the Continent, chiefly in March. Seeds are their

staple diet, hence the birds are mostly found where Nature has been allowed to run riot. Dandelion seeds, chickweed, and rape are great favourites. The cock is very attentive to the hen, often singing to her on the nest and also if any danger be threatened. The whole flock will rise on the wing at once if disturbed, but they do not go far, dotting some neighbouring bushes till the danger is over. Flocks travel about a great deal in search of food. The birds are always chirping to each other. So in all ways they are very favourite birds, and do not seem to trouble the gardener or fruit-grower much. Very large numbers of cocks are trapped to be kept for singing.

There must have been many more nests here, but time failed us. A weekly visit to such a spot during the breeding months of April, May and June would well repay a naturalist intent on birds' nests. In the woods through which we passed on the descent, were many traces of the work of woodpeckers. I photographed a hole one had made recently, as the pecked edges were still quite fresh. It was

in a tree in the densest part of the wood. The shy birds themselves were nowhere to be seen, so we could not determine whether the hole was the work of the green or the great spotted woodpecker (*see* Part I, p. 82), but it was most probably that of the green species which is much the commoner here. From the dense sylvan retreats came the well-known notes of a nightingale, and we both agreed that he was the finest we had ever listened to. But somehow each nightingale one hears is always finer than the last ! He stopped singing as he heard the sticks crackling under our feet. But if we stood quite still he would recommence his lays. He had a nest there I am sure, but it would have taken much searching to find it in the tangled undergrowth or the thick bushes. A Frenchman has put the song of the nightingale into words thus : ‘ *Le Bon Dieu m’a donné une femme, que j’ai tant tant tant battue, mais s’Il me donne une autre, je ne la batterai plus plus qu’ un petit qu’ un petit qu’ un petit.*’ (The good God has given me a

wife whom I have beaten so much, so much, so much, but if He gives me another I will not beat her any more, any more, only a little, only a little, only a little.) Hear this pronounced with the pure musical accent of the French language, and I think you will say the imitation is very good. I was amused the other day by reading a letter from an American in one of the daily papers. He said he had come to England (July) to see and hear the nightingale! Poor man—he hadn't read anything about the bird evidently. I would even recommend him Part I of this my modest little book, to say nothing of others on birds.

The path led us now through ranks of fine bluebells of the purest purple-blue, and countless primrose plants that must have been a fine sight a month before, but I doubt if they would have beaten the bluebells. Their leaves had now grown up strong and long as they do after flowering. The scent of the may just out, distilled by the bright sunshine, was powerful, coming from the higher ground

we had just left. Recollections of such scenes do not easily fade from the memory. They are thrown into violent contrast when one gets back to bricks and mortar, smoky chimneys, asphalted roads, and stinking, noisy motors. Some young starlings just out of the nest were here. Not yet certain of their wings, though frightened as we looked up at them sitting in the trees, they did not fly off, but kept up constant calls of distress to their parents not far away. These notes of fledgling starlings are characteristic. They are something like a scissor grinding, 'tchee-ee-ee-ze,' often repeated at a time, and also if very excited a quicker 'tchiz-z-z-ze,' followed by a still sharper 'tchit, tchit,' sounds something like but yet different to those of the adult cock as he sits at nesting-time on a chimney top or bough close to his sitting mate (*see* Part I, p. 40). I must not omit one nest we found, that of a jay, set in a thick may bush—they are always built in woods and dense bushes. It much resembled from below a blackbird's, but was quite

half again as large, or even like two black-birds' nests placed one on the other. Jay rhymes with gay, and this describes the plumage of the bird, which is at the same time very beautiful. Its general colour is a reddish-grey, but what strikes one at once is the bright blue (a tint quite its own), contrasting well with the rest of the upper half of the wings. The bird is also set off with a greyish crest, streaked black, which it often erects, and black is found on the wings, and it has a black beak and a moustache-like mark, whilst the under part of the tail is white, which is well seen in flight. It is seldom, however, that one can admire him in the wild state, as he is very wary, being hunted so much, and hides himself amongst thick greenery, which is his favourite haunt. But he will let you know by his well-known discordant chatter where he is ; he will chatter at you, and especially your dog, if you have one with you. The poor pretty jay is loved by few when alive, but is a favourite when stuffed ! He is such a depredator and robber

of other birds' eggs, that it is probable if he were not destroyed as he is that few other



XV: Jay ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

birds would be allowed to hatch out their eggs. An annual drive of jays is carried out in Epping Forest. Gamekeepers everywhere

shoot them on every possible occasion. They will eat fruit of all kinds, and peas, and any kind of grain, but they also eat insect pests and slugs, which is a redeeming feature. The eggs are five or six, of a yellowish-white ground colour, thickly marked with specks of pale olive-brown, and there are streaks of black at the large end. A second nest is not generally built in the season. The male and female are alike. The jay does not migrate and is widely distributed, though found locally. Small birds are much perturbed on the approach of this depredator, as they know his habits by bitter experience. He is a very excitable and restless and noisily lively bird, and this alone may frighten them. We heard what was probably the owner of the nest, but could not get a sight of him. The jay measures about thirteen inches.

We now entered an orchard, one well known in this district for its fine fruit, attached to an old-established farmstead.

Here was an enormous old cherry tree that each season bore a large crop of fruit.

Some large white fungi were flourishing on it. Half of the tree had fallen away by its weight. This left some long cracks in the thick main stem, and was just the spot for a starling to select for a nest. Plate XVI shows the tree with fungi on it. At the upper part of the trunk may be seen some bits of hay and straw sticking out from where a nest had been built. These birds are always slovenly builders (*see* Part I, p. 41). Starlings, however, prefer, I think, gutters and chimney nooks to build in. An old wooden gutter of my house is occupied each year by a starling's nest. It is situated at the back of the house which was built in the reigns of the Georges. Looking through a dense may hedge on the marshes, to which we had come now, a very large nest was apparent, but too high and too much concealed to photograph, unfortunately. It was the old nest of a magpie. (They are sometimes built quite low.) It was quite eighteen inches high and a foot across, made of sticks like a rook's or carrion crow's. It was shaped something like an egg or a foot-

ball. The framework was of large sticks and twigs, twined and interlaced firmly round the



XVI: Trunk of an old cherry tree in which a starling had built.

may branches. The inside, which was hollow, was lined with mud and inside this again

were roots and grasses to receive the eggs. Above all was a superstructure of loose sticks, a wise protection against the weather and other birds. At one side was a hole just large



XVII : Magpie ($\frac{1}{5}$ size).

enough to admit the bird. It was the dome, or rather roof, that made the nest look so high and gave it the egg shape. It was empty, but the hen lays five or six eggs of a pale bluish green, thickly spotted and marked

with ashy and olive-brown spots. Like rooks and carrion crows, magpies renovate their nest each year, having doubtless a good deal of trouble in building it, and like these birds, too, they mate for life. The jay's chatter once heard cannot be forgotten, nor can that of the magpie. 'Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat,' rapidly repeatedly, gives some idea of the magpie's notes. It would be impossible to miss seeing a magpie even from a distance, and you would not fail to hear his often-repeated phrases. The bird is eighteen inches long, the tail part alone being quite half its total length, and his black and white appearance distinguishes him at once. Besides this his peculiar flight would mark him out. The wings are very short and his long tail seems to impede him, so the flight is jerky and slow, and the wings are moved rapidly to keep him up at all. The head, neck and throat are a fine velvet black, and the back is the same colour, but it is thrown into sharp contrast by the upper part of the wings, which are white, the under part of the body being also white.

The ends of the wings and the tail are black but resplendent with a fine lustrous blue. Pilferer is the best name for this restless, handsome bird. He steals and eats other birds' eggs as well as devouring their young, and has, as probably most people well know, a great liking for carrying off and hiding bright objects as silver spoons and forks. So he shares the fate of the jay and is destroyed where game has to be preserved. But like the jay he redeems his character by eating insects and grubs, snails and slugs. He feeds also on beetles, frogs and the like and is a useful scavenger of carrion. I remember as a boy I used always to regard a magpie as a more or less loathsome bird, and when I shot one I always handled it with care, as he had generally been just feeding on some filth or other. The nest is attended to in April; only one brood is raised yearly, I believe. The bird does not migrate. He is found all over the country. The food is taken on the ground, on which he runs, hops and dashes about, often cocking up and expanding his

tail. He has a peculiar way of turning his head on one side and altogether has very frisky and busy habits. But he always appears as if he was bent on doing some secret mischief or other, and the smaller birds make a great outcry when he comes their way. The bird can be well tamed if taken young.

There were a good many wild pigeons and turtle doves in this neighbourhood. In an old well-tarred high-gabled barn with large open sides in which a few hay and manure carts were standing, some swallows had built a few nests inside the roof and as high as they could get. The birds had easy access to them through the open sides of the barn, but on entering had to fly upwards to the nests. Most of the nests were, as usual, *on* the rafters (*see* Part II, Plate XLIV), open, and of the usual pork pie shape, but two or three were built *against* the posts, and were similar in shape and position to those of house martins (*see* Part II, Plate XLI), with a rim like they have above for entrance, and *all* were constructed like theirs of pellets of clay. It was

the lambing season. A few lambs that had lost their mothers, were huddled together against a gate, getting all the warmth from the sun they could, and looked miserably ill. Peewits (described in Part I, pp. 93-7) were feeding on the marshes, their melancholy 'Pee-ee-wit' cry as they wheeled up on our approach attracting our attention to them. We caught sight also of an oyster-catcher, which was distinguished at once as rather a large bird, as large as a big pigeon (it measures sixteen inches), and by the conspicuous *white under part of the body* contrasting with the black upper parts. From this plumage he gets the name of the Sea Magpie, or *Sea Pie*. He has a red bill. He did not give us his shrill whistling cry. These birds often come up inland from the sea-shore, their favourite haunt, and feed on worms and grubs, if they cannot get enough of their soft food, viz., marine insects, mussels, and the like, there. Their long red beaks and legs well set off the black and white of their plumage. They look very pretty in captivity and are easily domes-

ticated. The nest is made in spring on the sea-shore, just above high water-mark. It is only a slight scratching in the earth (compare that of the pee-wit, Part I, Plate XLIII), and generally four eggs, about two inches long, are laid, of a yellowish stone colour, spotted grey and dark brown. The birds are found round our coasts in various parts. They congregate in small flocks in autumn and winter. When once seen and heard they are not easily forgotten. The birds are resident in this country. I had seen many *redshanks* here in the early part of the year. Their habits too are much the same as those of the peewit (*see* Part I, Plate XLIII), and oyster-catcher, and the nest is similar. The redshank, which is just under a foot long, has red legs (whence name). The upper plumage is brown and the under parts white. Four eggs are laid very early in spring (April) of a yellowish-grey colour spotted and marked with purplish brown. They nest even before the peewits, but do not come up, I think, so far inland to nest as they do. They reside in Great Bri-

tain. As we looked on to the flats we could see the great grey forms of a couple of herons a quarter of a mile away, feeding. They flew up as soon as we stopped to look at them,



XVIII: A pair of redshanks ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

even though we were so far off. I fancy even now I can hear their 'quawck' as they did so.

I have stated in Part II that I did not know how to distinguish the flight of the carrion

crow from that of the rook. 'As the crow flies' implies a direct line, and I saw some solitary crows that looked like carrion crows illustrating this on the marshes. Their flight was straight and low. The rook's is as a rule high, and certainly not a 'bee line.' A friend of mine who lives near here says he can always tell the carrion crow by this flight. To illustrate the boldness and ferocity of these birds, he told me he had come one day suddenly upon one which was feeding on the carcass of a dead sheep. As my friend approached, the bird was very loth to leave it, and did not do so till he was threatened with a stick, and even then he moved away only a few feet, and raised his wings and 'kor'-ed savagely the while—returning to his feast as soon as my friend turned his back to him.

We saw what is certainly uncommon, a mallard's nest in the stump of an old willow about ten feet from the ground. Ducks' nests are almost invariably *on* the ground (*see* Part I, p. 50, and Part II, p. 31). Why the bird had

chosen this altitude it is difficult to say. But a duck has been known to build even in a church steeple! One would think that the young would certainly be killed on their first flight from such a height. We were able before finishing for the day to pay a visit to the grounds of a fine old ruined moated castle in the vicinity. It had special attractions for us as the occupant, a lady, was very fond of birds and animals of all kinds, and so did not allow the place to be disturbed. Numerous jackdaws were flying about its dilapidated walls and were nesting in the old joist and loopholes. There were so many of them that some had to resort to the holes in the entrance towers, not heeding the people passing in and out. Two of the birds, not so shy as the others, could be seen sitting, one on the old vane, which bears the date 1767, and another on the turret, just at the foot of the flagstaff. Close by was a long trough in which sheep had been fed. On it were two dozen or more jackdaws, old and young, 'clacking' loudly and tumbling over each other as

they scrambled for the oatmeal the animals had left in it. I knew they would not wait for a photograph, unfortunately, without preparing a hiding-place for the camera. A great many mallards and moorhens had been nesting in and around the moat of the castle, and we disturbed several broods of them, for they were almost all hatched by now. In the branches of an old elder which hung over the still water, a sedge-warbler had built only a foot from the surface. The nest was cleverly placed out of reach. We much regretted the short time left at our disposal for exploring here, but in a long hedge, the last we searched for the day, we found many blackbirds' and thrushes' nests and also some linnets', hedge-sparrows' and chaffinches'. (These birds have already been described.) There were greenfinches here too and yellow hammers, and in a deodora was a goldfinch's nest about ten feet from the ground, unphotographable, of course. One nest of special interest was that of a redstart. We saw the bird. It was about the size of a hedge-sparrow and

its tail showed red as it flew from us. It came out of a low cut down may bush, in some marshy ground, and there in the fork of the main trunk and not more than two feet from the ground was the neat little round, open cup-shaped nest, with five pure blue eggs, just like those of a hedge-sparrow in colour, or perhaps with a greenish tint, but seen at a glance to be somewhat smaller. The nest was so protected all round by the forks of the low tree that it was impossible to photograph it. Indeed, we could only reach it by stretching down to it at arm's length. I have never seen a more protected nest. But this position is not usual with the bird, it being very fond of *holes* in trees and old walls. The redstart is a very pretty bird, of a robin or hedge-sparrow like appearance in form when seen close. But it has sober plumage, and like many other small birds without very distinctive colours or features it might not attract attention when seen flying, but a connoisseur would spot it. (This is one of the disappointing things in ornith-

ology to a beginner and a would-be learner. Unless the subject be carefully studied and acquaintance be made with the flight, general appearance and behaviour of the different birds, especially the small ones, a brown bird is a sparrow, a red one a robin, and so on.) The redstart has a white forehead. The head and upper part of the back is a blue-grey, the wings are brown and the throat is black. The red, a beautiful rusty tint, from which it gets part of its name, is found on the breast, under part of the body and tail, which is varied by two black feathers. The red tail has given it the name of Fire-tail. (This is the summer plumage, that of the winter is modified.) It is a migratory bird, arriving in April and returning to the Continent in September. It lives on insects chiefly, catching them in the air like the fly-catcher. It has a pretty song. It is not a common bird. High up in a may bush was an open, cup-shaped nest somewhat larger than a hedge-sparrow's and built of much the same materials, from which a brownish-looking bird larger

than a sparrow flew out. *It showed a distinct patch of grey on its back.* Now what bird was this? There were two points about it. It was a dark-coloured bird, somewhat larger than a sparrow, and it showed grey in the back. The red-backed shrike, or butcher-bird, immediately suggested the name to us, the grey patch being so noticeable. We looked in the nest and found four rather large eggs, for a small bird, of a pale ground colour, but spotted mostly at the larger end with brown. (The size of nests and of eggs diminishes or increases very regularly with the size of the bird, with a few exceptions, e.g. the eggs of the full snipe for which *see* Part II.) We sought for insects or beetles, etc., impaled on thorns near the nest (for this is the habit that gives the bird its name), but did not see any. This is a curious and apparently cruel feature of this bird. It extends its butchering habits even to other birds of its own or of a smaller size, and also to mice, shrews, frogs, lizards, etc., always sticking them on the thorns or twigs of some favourite bush, which it uses as a

larder. Among its victims are the hedge-sparrow, robin, and the tits, and various fledglings. The bird is fitted for this method of feeding by its hooked strong beak, and a well-formed, muscular body. It is not a very uncommon bird, and may often be seen near London. It frequents places where it can get its prey easiest, so it chooses open woods and commons. It watches for its victims perched on some convenient bough. It devours them at once or stores them up in its 'larder.' This cannibal plucks birds before eating them, and any indigestible portions are thrown up as pellets (like the owl and kingfisher). The length of the butcher bird is about five and a half inches; the upper parts are brown, the under parts white, the sides red. The hen has not got the grey patch on the back. It is migratory, leaving us in September or October.

And now the failing light warned us that we had to be getting homewards. As the train sped on, the sun setting orange-red in a cloudless sky of purple-gold (thus tinted

and its light subdued by the thick air of the Metropolis, so that we could easily look at it



XIX : Red-backed Shrike or Butcher-bird ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

without blinking) seemed, hanging there, to be racing us, as houses and trees were

passed in rapid succession, but always gaining in the race. A large balloon floated almost motionless over the Thames. The rooks and starlings that had been feeding on the flats during the day had left. Only sparrows were to be seen, communities of them, chirping noisily as is their manner in the evening when they go to their roosting nooks. How thankful, I thought, we ought to be that these homely little birds grace our roofs and chimneys. What would they be without them! Some high chalk cuttings stood out clearly in the evening light, and down on the riverside the clean, newly-born lambs snuggling round their dams quietly browsing the short grass were plainly visible, whilst their smoke-begrimed mothers were almost lost to view in the twilight. Some fleecy clouds overhead had gathered into the shape known as the mackerel sky, giving a promise, as is generally believed, of a fine day on the morrow, and we inwardly wished that we could spend yet one more day amongst the beautiful hills of Kent intent upon our birds and nests. And

then—the busy city environs once more with their streets and rows and rows of houses, looking like so many rabbit-hutches and great hoardings covered with flaring advertisements.

And the motley crowd, all so different to the quiet scenes of country life we had just left. But doubtless the great contrast makes us appreciate it all the more. And as the day was passing into night a single star, Venus, the star of the evening, blazed a bluish, scintillating light, before the hosts of the other stars had yet appeared in the domed firmament. Her rays (there was no moon yet) threw into dark contrast a rim of black thundery clouds that still clung to the horizon line. There was as yet light enough for the many youngsters that still played tennis and improvised cricket on the commons and grounds we passed, though the players had to stoop low now and intently fix their gaze upon the balls to see them at all. The fine warm evening, the first we had experienced this season, had drawn them out by hun-

dreds, and they were making the best of it until the blackness of night compelled them to stop. And the older ones, who loved their flowers, were still tending them in their little garden plots, weeding here, watering there. And so still was the air that even the poplar leaves were motionless and only rustled as the train rushed by, inviting rest. And I must confess this time to having felt tired, and glad was I when camera and kit were once more put down upon the doorstep of home. But the memories of the few past hours still lingered with us, as we sought Nature's sweet restorer, sleep, to fit us for the duties of the following day.

CHAPTER V

BY THE WATERSIDE ONCE MORE—SECOND WEEK IN JUNE

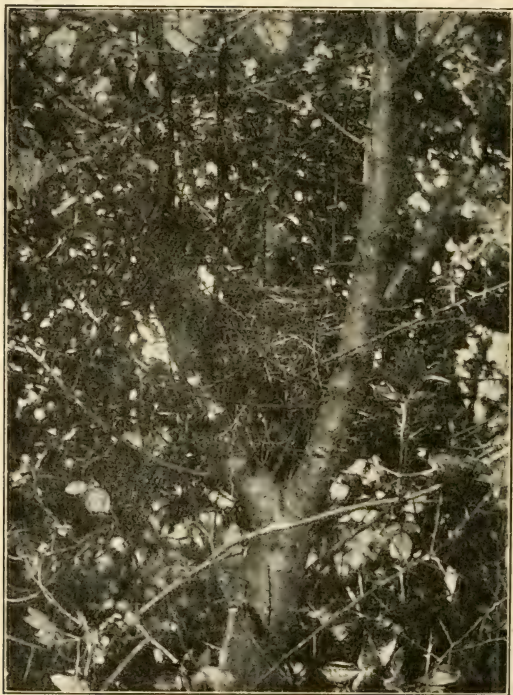
THE season was now well advanced, but it is never certain what nests may be found until well into summer. Then second and third broods are being reared by some birds. We were particularly fortunate in the second week in June when visiting waters we had before explored, to come upon the nest of a great crested grebe, close to London. I had noticed what was probably the pair of birds now building here, about these parts since the last season. They had become located, evidently finding it a quiet place and getting plenty of aquatic weeds, fish, frogs and water insects to feed on. Many other uncommon birds would live and breed here were it not that the place is shot over several times each

winter. The wild duck, chiefly mallards, attract the sportsmen, and come in hundreds sometimes. A few remain all the year if not killed. *They* are good to eat, so the sport may be justified. But every other available bird of any size is, unfortunately, also shot, whether good to eat or not. Moorhens and coot and also snipe are all 'game' birds, I know, and edible—but, and I will leave the matter there. The carrion crows might be advantageously destroyed, but they are too wary for the gunners. The great grebe used to be much more common in England, but it has gone the way, alas, of many other beautiful birds in this country. And now a most commendable bill in Parliament this year (1908) to protect birds of paradise and others being imported for their plumage, may result in the extermination of the British kingfisher, and indeed any bird from which pretty feathers, forsooth, can be obtained.

A search through Pochard Island (*see* Part I, p. 115) revealed nothing *new* to us in the way of nests or birds, and the undergrowth

had become by this time of the year very thick and almost impenetrable, making it very hard to see anything in it, to say nothing of the pricks and scratches suffered in searching through it. The sedge-warblers were there as before (*see* Part II, pp. 130-1), and had their young now. One bird we noticed with a morsel in its beak. It kept to the bush tops, as sedge-warblers do when disturbed, and despite the fact that it had food in its beak it uttered some notes of song, though they were occasional. The uttering of musical notes, however, with the beak closed, is not confined to the sedge-warbler, as other birds often do the same. We watched it go to the little family, and then found some other nests, including that of a song-thrush built in the fork of a tall may tree, which I photographed as being very typical (Plate XX). It makes a dark picture, for the nest was in the shadow of thick greenery, but it shows just what nests look when you peer into a dense thicket in search of them. I took a snap-shot of the pretty island, a lovely mate-

less white swan obligingly swimming into the foreground just in the nick of time.

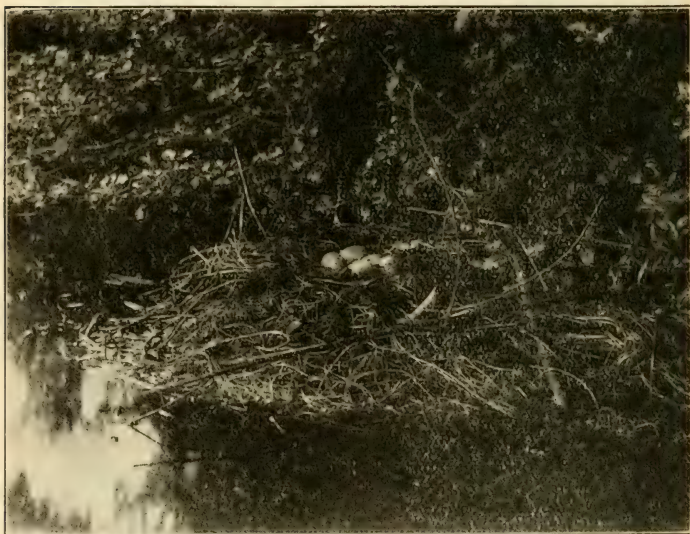


XX: Nest of song-thrush in dense greenery ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

We rowed round the back of the island, a spot that no one had visited this season, and just as we came to the secluded corner where

we had found the pochard's nest (*see* Part I, p. 114) we were surprised to see a large nest close to the shore, *standing out of the shallow water* here, in which five eggs were plainly visible. And coming to the surface suddenly some fifty yards away, and diving again almost as quickly, was a handsome long and sharp-beaked bird, in size between a duck and a goose, and one that looked keenly alive to its surroundings, and was very quick in its movements, and a bird which once seen *close* could never be confused with any other British species. It was a great crested grebe. I had never been so near to one before, and the bird would have been half a mile or more away, long before this with us there, had it not been concerned about its nest. It kept diving and reappearing rapidly backwards and forwards all the time we were there, remaining under water about half a minute, and swimming under water quite fifty yards each time. There was no mistaking it to be the owner of the nest and the sitting female bird by her per-

turbed behaviour. She had slipped quietly and quickly unnoticed by us into the water (as a moorhen on the nest does sometimes when approached) as soon as we turned the



XXI : Nest of the great crested grebe, with eggs
($1\frac{1}{2}$ size).

bend of the island in the boat, partly covering her eggs with loose pieces of her nest when she did so (as many, especially water birds do). Not to disturb her more

than necessary, we hurried to take a photograph. Divesting himself of his boots and socks Ted got out of the boat, and standing up to his knees in the water, fixed up the camera, the legs of the tripod being also in the water, and focussed, giving two exposures which I rapidly estimated, and which proved correct. A large shoal of young perch, about an inch long, kept swimming between his bare legs the while, and he said that he could feel some of the bigger ones bobbing their noses against what must have appeared to them in their quiet water nursery down there, a sudden apparition of two great columns of white, soft, apparently edible substance, suddenly placed there for their especial benefit! The nest, which was very prettily situated in a little bay under some may bushes hanging over the water, was about two feet long, eighteen inches wide, and stood nearly a foot out of the water. It was a rough oval in shape, and of a green colour, being constructed almost entirely of the long still wet and fresh stems of the floating

pondweed with the terminal leaves intact, and a few dried sticks, thus much resembling in material and shape (but smaller in size) that of the swan (*see* Part I, p. 58). It was not unlike also that of the coot figured and described in Part II, p. 124, but it was not floating like that one, but was built on the bottom, the water being about six inches deep here. (Had the water risen this nest would certainly have been washed away, but the water was at its highest, and this the bird had calculated on doubtless.) Floating pondweed was the only material in these waters, besides dead sticks, available for the birds to build with, hence the similarity of these three nests. (The pochard, Part I, p. 114, also used the same weed for her nest.) The summit of the nest was somewhat hollowed, and there was no special lining, and on this the five eggs were laid (like those on the nest of the coot, Part II, p. 125). They were about one and a half inches long and of a dark buff or cream tint, without any spots. The ground colour of these eggs is described as being of a pale blue, but they were covered

with a soft chalky substance, giving them the colour described, and looked, therefore, much like wild ducks' eggs of this shade. We saw the mother bird go back to her eggs immediately we were out of the way. She was no doubt very anxious about them, for they felt heavy, were slightly cracked here and there, and were much soiled, showing that they were very near hatching. (I saw five young birds later on swimming about.)¹ There were no signs of the male, and I do not know what part he takes, if any, in the building of the nest and the tending of the young. Carrion Crow Island was close by but I think the grebes, with their long sharp pointed beaks, and even the female alone, would have been quite a match for these annoying marauders had they interfered. The fact of the great crested grebe building here shows that the rarer birds can be attracted even though so near London *provided they are not disturbed*. Within a hundred yards of the grebe's nest, we had found in former seasons (*see* Parts I and II)

¹ All these young birds were shot here the following winter, 'to be stuffed,' I was told.

five other nests, certainly very uncommon only some eight miles from the centre of London, viz., those of (1) the pochard, (2) carrion crow, (3) coot, (4) wigeon and (5) full snipe. Not a hundred yards from the spot is a public road. It is carefully fenced off, but it is somewhat astonishing, nevertheless, that these birds, especially the very nervous grebe, were not frightened away by the traffic, which includes occasional motor cars. And further, skirting these waters on two sides about half a mile from the spot, are lines of railway, with, of course, regular and frequent trains, whilst on a third side football and cricket cause a disturbance throughout the year, and there are also innumerable rows of houses round about. The whole place is enclosed. Doubtless any water-loving bird on migration by night or day, though flying miles away from London, would have its attention drawn by the reflection of the many acres of water, besides being attracted to it intuitively by its inborn sense. And finding the place quiet, without

any human beings or houses in it, would perhaps settle there for the night at least, and not being molested and finding food, some remain there permanently (only, unfortunately, to be shot!). The great crested grebe, as I have mentioned, is a very handsome bird, and has been much sought after for its feathers. Its length is about twenty inches or more. The upper parts of the male are dark brown, but the under parts are a lovely silky white. The upper parts of the wings are white, which show as the bird swims. The head is set off with a crest of dark chestnut, and the neck is ornamented with a ruff of the same colour, the cheeks are white, the eyes are piercing. It is a resident in our country, and found chiefly in the eastern counties, whilst many visit us from the north of Europe. Four or five eggs are laid. I do not think a second brood is raised. The bird utters a sharp harsh cry during the nesting season, mostly at night I would imagine. I have never heard it.

Another bird of the same species, very different in appearance and only half the size

(9-10 in. long), is the little grebe, or dabchick. It is also resident in this country, widely diffused, but local in its habitat, going to the coast in severe winters. It builds generally in quiet waters, a *floating* nest of the stems and leaves of water plants, which is hard to find, as the bird always covers it over on leaving, although the spot in which it is built is not in great concealment. It is rarely, however, that you can get at the nest without a boat. Three to six eggs are laid at the end of April or beginning of May. They are white and rough. A second nest is generally built each year. There are very few of these birds near London.

After landing we saw a pair of yellow wagtails busy flitting to and fro over a sloping bank of tall grass. Their long tails, louping flight, and the two long white outer tail feathers were their distinctive features as wagtails, whilst their general colour distinguished them from other wagtails. There was evidently a nest with young there. A few moments' search and we found it. It con-

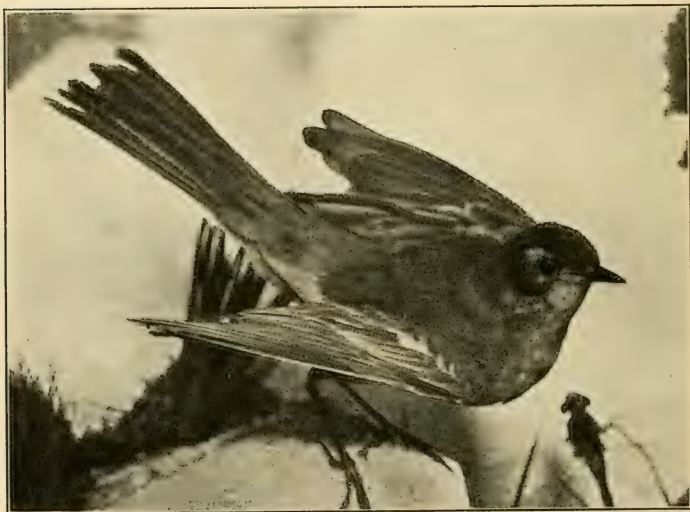
tained four fledglings. One waddled out as we looked in at them. This Ted caught carefully and held it whilst I took two photographs. It was affecting to see the anxiety



XXII : Fledgling yellow wagtails in nest ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

of the parent birds whilst I manipulated the camera. They kept flying round in great distress, uttering a single weak and plaintive 'tweet' every now and then. When the youngster Ted held squeaked, the old birds,

which at ordinary times would not let you get near them, almost flew at us. We hastened over the business, Ted replacing the little one amongst its yellow fluffy little



XXIII : Yellow wagtail ($\frac{1}{2}$ size).

companions as we left. They had been very good sitters, as the exposures had been twenty-five seconds each, and the plates showed not the slightest movement on their part. Does Nature teach them to remain quite still when danger looms, so as to be the less detected?

Later in the season I saw these youngsters flying about near by. Their parents were very attentive to them and fed them assiduously. Both they and their parents seemed fond of telegraph wires, on which they appear to get a firm perch. A wagtail is so called because it wags its tail whilst on the ground up and down (not from side to side) and that continuously. The tail is long and drooping, the two outer feathers being white and show markedly in flight. They keep much to the ground but also perch frequently. The flight is louping (or undulating), that is of a jerky description. So these characteristics at once mark these birds. There are three British wagtails,¹ (1) The *Yellow* Wagtail, about six inches long, and (2) and (3) the *Pied Wagtail* and the *Grey Wagtail*, a little longer (seven and a half inches). The *Yellow* wagtail is so called because its lower parts are yellow, and there is a yellow streak over the eye (back and upper parts of wings greenish olive). The *pied* receives its name because it is black and white, and the *grey* because

¹ They are about the size of sparrows, but have long tails.

its head and back are bluish-grey, though the under parts are yellow like the yellow wagtail. Young birds of the *grey* species of the first year have not yet the yellow on the under parts, the plumage there being grey. Thus the majority of the birds are grey, and this species has been consequently so named. The yellow wagtail is a visitor to this country, arriving in March or April and going away in autumn, whilst many of the *pied* and the *grey* are with us all through the year, though not remaining always in the same locality, and others migrate and some come to us. The nests of all three species are built on the ground amongst tall grasses. But the birds often perch on trees, and as we have just seen on telegraph wires. Their nests are open, the cup being shallow, and made of hay, grass, and fine fibres, and lined with feathers and hair. The eggs number from four to six. The colours are : (1) *Yellow Wagtail* : white ground mottled with pale olive brown ; (2) *Pied Wagtail* : pale bluish spotted *greyish* brown ; (3) *Grey Wagtail* : white or grey mottled and spotted pale brown

and olive. These birds are very elegant in their movements on the ground. They may be found chiefly (but not exclusively) alongside streams or waters. They *run* along the ground (never hop) and stop suddenly, wagging their tails all the while, and the louping flight is very graceful. (It is difficult to understand why these birds wag their tails.¹ Why, we might ask, has the great grebe the peculiar ruff, and there are many similar questions which occur to us if we think about them. Trying to find answers to these questions is part of the interesting study of natural history.) *Some distinguishing features of the three wagtails beside plumage, are : Yellow Wagtail : note, 'tweet,' or 'tweet tweet.'* Does not generally go near houses. Often seen with cattle catching insects ; (2) *Pied Wagtail : black and white plumage distinctive. More common than the yellow. Often seen near houses, on lawns, and amongst*

¹ The constant wagging of the tail is probably to give them an impetus to move forward or fly up at any instant to catch a quick-flying insect. They run rapidly.

cattle, but specially fond of water and known as *the* water wagtail and dishwasher. Note, 'physic, physic,' or 'chizzick, chizzick,' uttered in the air. (3) *Grey Wagtail*: least common of the three species. Perhaps the most graceful. Note, as the pied wagtail all the wagtails live on insects. The males and females are much alike.

On returning homewards we saw two or three pairs of the *tufted ducks* that frequent these parts, swimming about, the males and females keeping close to each other. The former were very distinct from the latter, their pure white sides being very evident as they floated, and also when flying overhead, while the females (as seen from a distance when swimming) appeared of a uniform sombre brown and black. We had not been fortunate enough to find their nest, but they breed here, I would think. They build on the ground (like other ducks) and lay eight to ten greenish-blue eggs, which are surrounded with down when the clutch is laid, in fact it is the usual duck's nest.

The birds have been mentioned in Part II, p. 19-21.

LAST WEEK IN JUNE

I did not think to find many more nests this season, but I came across another one of the wigeon, close to Swan Island (*see* Part I, p. 181) on the mainland. The grass was now ready for the scythe and one of the mowers flushed the hen on the eggs as he got up to it in his work. He did not, countryman like, take any notice of the bird, but continued mowing, when suddenly the point of his scythe passed through the nest, but fortunately only disturbing a small portion of it; and equally fortunately breaking only one egg—there were ten altogether. He told me it was ‘just turned,’ so that the bird had not been sitting long. The eggs were not at all soiled, bearing out his statement. When I arrived on the scene I found all the grass cut and lying about in heaps, as is usual after the first turning. The man had a tender heart, and had fixed up a dead branch close

to the nest, and covered this with cut grass so that the bird might 'think it were all right loike,' and come back to it. I at once saw the hen accompanied by the male swimming about fifty yards away. A swan and the male great grebe of the nest we had found the other day (*see* p. 122) also appeared on the scene, and a male tufted duck flew over my head. The white of the under part of the body showed distinctly. His flight was very rapid, and as Ted would have said in sportsman's phraseology, he would have required 'some stopping.' The male wigeon was easily distinguished by the white on the sides of the wings, the female being only black and brown. He kept swimming about close to his mate all the time, showing that in the case of the wigeon, just as with other ducks, the male duck does not leave the hen till she is fairly sitting (*see* remarks on the mallard in Part I, p. 145). The nest was about ten inches in diameter and built in a hollow in the ground (*see* wigeon's nest, Part II, p. 181) and contained nine eggs of their usual

light putty shade (*see* Part II, p. 189). As the hen bird was evidently wishing much to return to her nest and kept swimming towards it every now and then with the male in faithful attendance (though like other ducks he does not, I believe, help in making the nest, and the down on the eggs comes from the breast of the female). I endeavoured to snap-shot them as they came to it. Focussing the camera and setting the shutter, I concealed myself behind a high heap of cut grass that I made, having the releasing tube ready to blow into as I did with the sparrow (*see* Part II, p. 15). I waited a full hour, but the hen though evidently distressed and keeping up a pleading 'twee twee,' all the time, did not like the look of things, and I had to content myself with an exposure of the pair some thirty yards away, getting only very small images with my half-plate lens. I unfortunately had no time to rig up a better concealment for the camera and myself, losing a good opportunity of getting a pretty photograph. As I lay awaiting the duck's

approach, a moorhen swam out into the foreground. (Moorhens in feeding swimming about look very pretty. They may often be observed in our parks and waters, where they become quite tame. The tail is kept cocked up, its pure white clean feathers contrasting strongly with the general black colour of the rest of the plumage. The bird proceeds on the water in little quick jerks, the head and tail moving in unison backwards and forwards with each paddle of the foot, now the right and then the left being used in turn.) This bird, a hen, kept 'cheerie-' ing all the time (a note, I thought, much resembling the call of the cock partridge though weaker) alternating this with an occasional sharp 'chit chit.' These continued sounds were meant to console a recently-hatched young one which I afterwards found in a nest close by, finding the exact spot (which was in the stump of a willow close to the water) by its weak, plaintive and constantly repeated 'chewie' to its mother as it lay amongst six unhatched eggs in the nest.

It was getting towards evening as I left, and I knew that the hen wigeon would at all events soon go to her eggs, though I was afraid she would forsake the eggs as the hay-makers would disturb her again very soon. (I came down here a few days after this and crept down to the nest. The hen, I was glad to find, was sitting all right, and I had a good look at her only ten yards off. She got off the eggs, however, and I snap-shotted her as she swam away. The wigeon has been described and figured in Part II, pp. 182-3).

I will describe here the nest of a *chiffchaff* which we found during a walk we took, in north of London, in this month (June). We sauntered down a shady country road (*see* Front.) and then into open country where there was more chance of finding birds building. The nest was on the ground in some tall grass, in which it is often built, and was difficult to find. We happened on it, the bird flying off just before we got to it, thus attracting our attention. (On p. 162 of Part II

I described how we had watched a hen chiff-chaff feeding her young—the nest being dilapidated.) It contained four small eggs, of a pinky, almost white, colour, with blackish-purple spots and dots, and were of a noticeable shape, being round at one end and decidedly pointed at the other. The shells were very thin. Grasses, dead leaves, moss and bits of bark were the materials of the nest, and it was arched over, or domed as it is called, with grass, an opening being left at one side for entrance. The interior was well lined with feathers, hair and some wool. Ted tells me he has found most of these nests on the ground and in grass, but they are often also built in a bank, or in the stump of an old tree. The bird is small (four and a half inches long) sleek and delicate, and it is surprising how such loud notes as its ‘chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff’ (from which it gets its name, and which I have mentioned more than once), should come from so small a bird. It also utters if disturbed two notes, which some spell ‘whoo-id.’ It is not often one

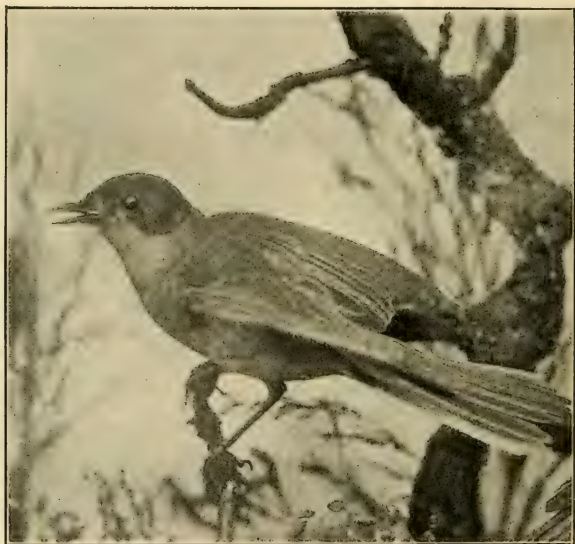
sees the plain little innocent-looking chiffchaff, but when you have heard the notes, stop still and watch for it carefully. It may sometimes be seen in our gardens, especi-



XXIV : Nest of chiffchaff (almost lost to view in the surrounding grass).

ally in the autumn, flitting about the twigs in a peculiar busy, jerky little way. The bird has no gay colours to distinguish it, and can boast of only two shades, the upper parts

being olive-green, tinted yellow, and the under parts yellowish white. This warbler thus somewhat resembles its cousin the willow wren or willow warbler (*see* Part II, Plate LI).



XXV : Chiffchaff ($\frac{2}{3}$ size).

The male and female are indistinguishable. The delicate little beak is only suited to catch insects, moths, flies, caterpillars and such creatures, but like the tender robin and

hedge-sparrow, etc., it can use its beak for attack and self-defence sturdily, even though against a bigger bird that threatens its nest. The *young* naturalist will, I think, especially near London and large towns, be quite as much impressed with the notes of the chiffchaff in early spring (March) as with the cuckoo as a harbinger of spring. I have vivid recollections of it in this respect as a boy, but never knew, till I studied the subject, from what bird the sounds came (for I never saw the bird), sounds which give one (especially when young life blood is coursing through the veins) that inexpressible ecstatic feeling that the finer and warmer weather of spring is coming again, and that birds and plants will once more delight the ears and eyes in the fields and hedgerows. Unlike the nightingale, the chiffchaff's song is continued throughout the season, though it is not so insistent towards the end of the summer, when it leaves us in company with the host of other migrants.

CHAPTER VI

A DRAMA AND TRAGEDY IN BIRD LIFE IN AN AVIARY, AND AFTER

TED has a large aviary, in which he keeps several different kinds of birds flying about promiscuously. They include turtle doves, bramblingfinches, linnets, siskins, bullfinches, greenfinches, goldfinches, and black-headed buntings (or as they are better called, reed buntings, *see* Part I, p. 56, to distinguish them from the rare visitor to this country, the true black-headed bunting which has a yellow breast). I will relate an interesting bird drama and tragedy that occurred in the aviary last June, the *dramatis personae* being two pairs of bullfinches. Ted told me that to his astonishment and delight one of the two pairs of bullfinches had made a nest against the brick wall of the aviary in

the back branches of a low elder bush planted in it. (It is quite a rare occurrence, I believe, for these birds to nest in captivity.) He had placed a piece of wire netting there as a foundation for a nest so as to entice any of the birds to choose the spot for building. The hen (not the cock, notice) constructed the nest in a peculiar way. Books on birds tell you that it is built of 'fine fibres and rootlets.' She had plenty of hay and fibre supplied for her use, but she ignored these, and set to work and stripped the bark piece by piece (each piece being five or six inches long) from a dead and half dried-up bush placed in the aviary as a perch, rending them as thin as coarse bristles. These fibres were of a yellow colour being the inner bark or bast. (Her strong beak was well suited for this.) With these she formed the foundation of the nest, but twined in some thin sticks as well. She worked the whole into a beautiful open cup-shaped nest, and lined it with some dog's hair combings from Ted's retriever also placed in the aviary. Of course I photographed the

nest (Plate XXVI). It was only three feet from the ground so I had no difficulty



XXVI: Nest (and eggs) of bullfinch, built in an aviary
($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

in getting at it. This gives a clue as to where the fine fibres so often seen in many

small birds' nests may come from, and which have always puzzled me. These may be in many cases the 'rootlets and fibres' of books. I have always failed to see how little birds could dig up these long thin 'rootlets,' and what plants they and the fibres come from. Four eggs of the usual greenish-blue colour, spotted and streaked with dark purple-brown spots (*see* Part II, p. 187) were laid. But in a few days, unfortunately, the hen of the other pair of bullfinches who had meanwhile lost her mate, which had hanged himself by accident with a piece of cotton, set about the sitting bird and killed her. (What part this act played in the economy of Nature is a puzzle I cannot solve.) This left a pair still alive. They mated at once, and a week after the death of Mrs. Bullfinch No. 1, Mr. B. No. 1 and Mrs. B. No. 2 pulled the nest of Mr. and Mrs. B. No. 1 to pieces and rebuilt it in some ivy on the wall. Three eggs were laid, but they were never hatched! Was it that the pair that mated last were real affinities to one another, and should have

paired in the first instance? Mrs. B. No. 2 succeeded in checkmating her rival, but was not successful in rearing her own brood! Perhaps a righteous retribution for her cruel act! The bullfinch has been described in Part II and a plate of a nest in a deodora which does not show the nest well is given on p. 107 (Part II), but this one illustrates the cup formation, and the relative size of the nest. There was no evidence, however, of any special platform to the nest described in some books as being peculiar to the bullfinch. We see here, too, once again how a bird often utilizes materials that are close to hand for the purpose of building (compare nest of robin, Part II, p. 2). There must be incidents similar to what I have just related in wild bird life. It is very rare, however, to find dead birds (or animals) lying about, for Nature is her own scavenger as I have before remarked.

CHAPTER VII

A SECOND VISIT TO THE NORTH OF KENT— THIRD WEEK IN JUNE

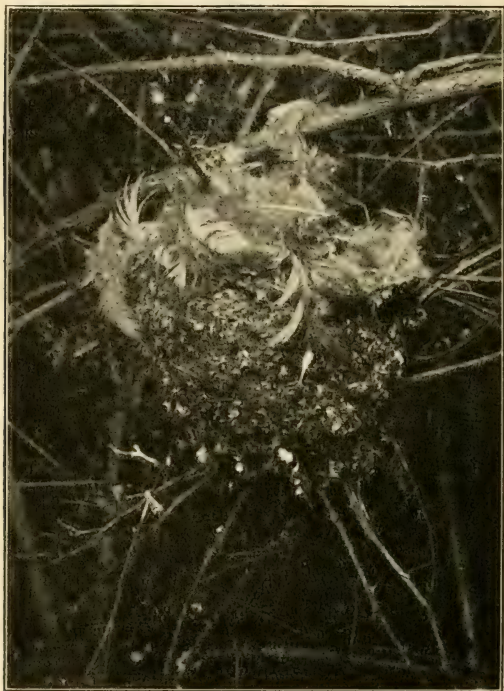
WE had kept in mind the nest of the long-tailed tit mentioned in Chap. IV, and having the opportunity availed ourselves of it to get a photograph of the nest, as well as to pick up what other points of interest we could. The trees in the fine old orchards were now laden with fruit, and cherry picking was to commence the next week, whilst ripe strawberries were coming in. And what a difference a month had made. The wheat, barley and oats, especially tall and full in the ear, in this congenial soil and a very favourable season, were up about three feet. Not a speck of may bloom now, but many festoons of red and white wild roses in wanton profusion. How beautiful they are !

We soon got to the barn in which the swallows had built (*see* p. 102), and having more time at our disposal this time, Ted investigated some of them. Mounting one of the carts he was able to reach a cross beam, and being as nimble as a monkey, was soon on to it and produced for my inspection some of the white purple-red spotted swallow's eggs (*see* Part II, p. 187). Close by a solemn old farm cat sat on the post of the garden gate leading to the farmhouse, watching us. He would have liked, doubtless, to have been able to get up to the swallows' nests as easily as Ted had done. Did his expression imply this, or did his 'Ha! I've eaten the canary' look mean that he had already had a good meal of some bird or other? (I can never fathom what a *cat* means as it stares at you; one always seems to know, however, what a *dog* wants to say.)

We were still on the flats, with its waving fields of wheat and barley. The hills rose behind, inviting us to climb them. Close here was the nest of the long-tailed tit, men-

tioned in Chapter IV. It was so low that I had no difficulty in getting over it for a photograph. The fact that the tits had chosen a site which was just over a ditch did not seem to agree with the ingenuity these tits show in building their nest (*see* Part I, p. 86), for it would seem that as soon as the youngsters emerged they would fall into the water, and I tried to imagine the scene that may have taken place, when the anxious parents found one or more of them struggling for life, a cruel introduction into this world surely! The lower part of the nest showed the characteristic oval or cocoa-nut shape and size, but the upper part was now hidden by a mass of projecting feathers, the young birds having, I suppose, pulled them out from the entrance hole near the top in their earliest efforts to fly and in being fed, for no one had passed that way to disturb the nest. Or perhaps the old birds had destroyed the inside purposely, as they do sometimes on quitting it, I believe. I photographed the nest just as I found it, and even in this condition no one

could have denied that it was pretty ; the loose curling feathers breaking up the mo-



XXVII: Nest of long-tailed tit after the family had left it ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

notony of the contour, though the shape is elegant at all times, and the lichen with which it is constructed makes it altogether a work

of much art (*see* nest of long-tailed tit in Part I, p. 86). The whole structure is solid and strong, resembling felt, the walls being quite an inch thick. After photographing it, I pulled it out from its hangings (I had removed all the twigs in front for the photo) and found I could turn it inside out like a glove without tearing it! Think then what a comfortable, safe, and warm home it is for the tender and diminutive inmates, that hatch out from the smallest of all the British birds' eggs. But at the same time it is astonishing how a family of nine or ten or more, which they generally are, can live in such a confined space and amongst a mass of feathers, without being suffocated! And how are they all fed too, without one or more being neglected?

Returning another way we came upon a nest which was empty, but on the edge lay some pieces of shells which were white, with pale purplish-red specks. Seen from below (Plate XXVIII) it was quite different in appearance to nests built with dried grass and

fine fibres, such as those of the hedge-sparrow, thrush, and many others, being more solid and deeper, and the materials were more loosely put together and consisted of thick rootlets intermixed with moss, the lining being wool, horsehair, and feathers. It was evidently the nest of a greenfinch. Any one who has heard the long drawn out 'twa-a-y' of the greenfinch as it sits on a bush top, when it thinks you are interfering with the nest or at other times cannot forget it. It has other notes impossible to attempt in words, which it keeps often uttering to its fellows near by. It is a sturdy rather heavy-looking bird, somewhat of the linnet type. The plumage is very distinctive, viz., greenish-yellow, or we may put it yellowish-green, toned down by a good deal of dull grey here and there. The yellow in the male is bright in full sunlight, but it is not often that one has the chance of seeing the birds thus lit up, for they hide themselves much on your approach in thick greenery. The hen is about the same size and has the same plumage, but it is much

duller, passing even to a *lead*en grey hue. But the bright yellow on the edges of the wings and tail are there! In the field the

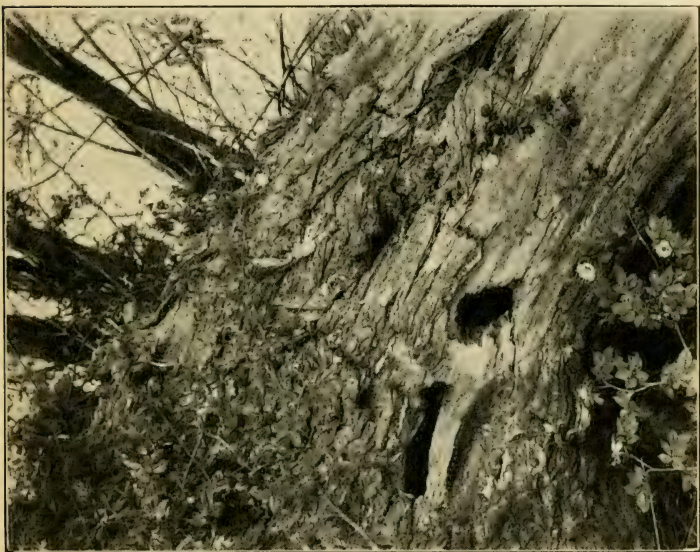


XXVIII: Nest of greenfinch ($\frac{1}{6}$ size).

greenfinch looks something like the common sparrow without its markings, and is about the same size, but the male has a greenish, and

the female an olive tinge. The greenfinch has the cognomen of the green linnet, and is known commonly by this name amongst bird catchers who capture quantities of this easily-deceived bird. They are sociable, going about in small flocks even in the breeding season. At the end of summer, when nesting is over, they congregate in *large* numbers, associating often with linnets and chaffinches. They are then seeking their food, which consists of seeds chiefly, of all kinds, those of the dandelion being the favourite. In flight they keep close together, and if disturbed the whole flock take cover as soon as possible. Many migrate in autumn, but many also remain with us all the year round. Greenfinches are prolific, five or six (or more) eggs being laid at a time (the first batch in early spring) and rearing three or four broods each season. It is one of the nests to be looked for late in the season. It is built fairly high, generally at the top of a tall bush, or low in a tree. The birds are very numerous in some places, and are widely distributed.

Plate XXIX shows an old decaying tree trunk in which were some holes. The edges had been freshly pecked. They were too small to admit the hand. Such a place



XXIX : Holes in an old trunk, with freshly-pecked edges.

should never be passed over when looking for birds' nests as you cannot tell whether it be occupied or not. Woodpeckers, tits, creepers, wrynecks, this last bird very early

in the year, and some others might be nesting in it.

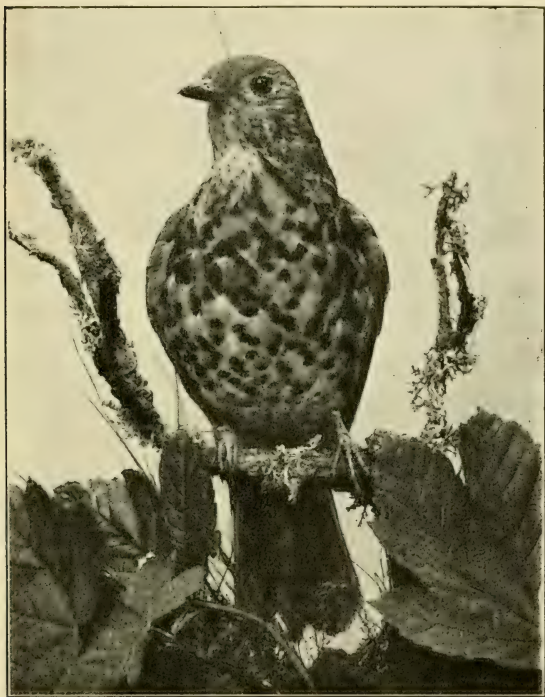
On the way to the station we passed a pretty little church of Dickens fame, where the ten little graves of Pip's ten little brothers (Dickens mentions only five) can be seen (*see Dickens' Great Expectations*, p. 1). We flushed a partridge in a field. The noise its wings make when rising is always loud and quite startling if unexpected. I was struck with how it resembles the noise a horse makes as he clears his wind passages sometimes when pulling a heavy cart up hill. Being now evening many rooks were returning to their roosting-trees (the old and young birds had quitted the rookeries to frequent the meadows (*see Part II*, p. 84). A large oak far away from houses was the chosen tree for one colony. The birds arrived over it all together and one by one they wheeled down, with a babel of cawing, a typical scene of old England this ! Others had not yet left the fields and sat motionless, replete, doubtless, with a good repast,

awaiting a signal, I expect, from the leader to fly up and away to roost. We crossed the Thames as the sun was nearing the horizon. A few seagulls were still flying about seeking food stuff from the flotsam and jetsam that was being carried along with the swift-flowing, falling tide. Tugs that had been busy all day were now being brought up to their moorings for the night. As we sat in the station waiting for the train, we were witnesses of a bird incident. The high roof of the station in which were several glass windows and ventilators like venetian blinds, was supported by many iron rods at various angles. All the panes of glass were intact. A house-martin had flown through an open door following, doubtless, the flight of insects through it from the river close by, and followed them up to the gabled glass roof. Once in, the bird was caught in a trap, expecting to find an exit in an upward direction. A porter told us it had got in some three or four hours previously and had been flying round and round under the gabled

roof all the time, dexterously avoiding the many irons, and catching the insects which had mounted up there. It could easily have got out if it had stopped a moment and passed through one of the many downward sloping ventilators, but this creature of the free air never thought of doing this, nor did it have the instinct to venture downwards to the door again, and ever sought to escape skywards. Poor bird, it was so tired by this time that it keep alighting every few moments on one or other of the iron bars, alarmed and hopeless. There was no means of letting it escape, and it could have been captured only by means of a tall ladder and much trouble. It would doubtless have roosted all the night, only to commence its weary round at daybreak, without any water to drink, although there would have been by then a fresh supply of insects for it, I expect. I wonder what became of it ultimately!

I must notice another bird whose nest we had found in Kent (in the early spring), but there are many of the birds near London, that

is, the missel thrush. A glance at Plate XXX will show you its similarity to the common



XXX : Missel Thrush ($\frac{1}{3}$ size).

song thrush of our gardens in general appearance and plumage, but it is a longer bird, measuring eleven inches (song thrush nine

inches), considerably broader, and has much larger and many more of the rounded black spots on the chest. (Male and female are alike, except a general duller colour in the latter.) It also sits up in a statuesque manner foreign to the song thrush, and has also an easy strong up and down and not a straight flight. Moreover they are not nearly so common. Indeed, in a walk near London you would see a hundred song thrushes to one missel thrush, and they are not found in all parts. You would be attracted at once to it, and say 'What a large thrush, and what big spots it has!' In the winter (for they do not migrate, though they may go south from cold) the birds join into small flocks which shift about from place to place. They separate much from each other after alighting, when pitching to feed in a meadow. Observe them and you will see they sit motionless, upright, watchful and wary, for several moments together, then take a run like the song thrush does and then are motionless again. One of its notes, also, is peculiar. I cannot put it

into words, it is harsh—in fact, a scold or a scream, but the *song* of the male is sweet,



XXXI: Nest and eggs of missel thrush. (The eggs were raised so as to show them) ($\frac{1}{4}$ size).

though heard *only at nesting-time* and not in the later part of the year. He seems to prefer

singing in rough stormy weather, perched high on some branch blown about by the wind, whence his cognomen, the *storm-cock* or *storm thrush*. The birds are great fighters. The food is like that of the blackbird and song thrush, but it is very fond of berries. It was once believed that mistletoe berries had to be swallowed and voided by these birds before they would germinate, hence missel-thrush. (I used to think it was named from the large mistletoe-berry shaped spots on the breast.) The bird must not be confounded with the fieldfare, a somewhat shorter and narrower thrush-like bird, which is a winter visitor only, and which has a dark greyish-blue head, neck, and back, and a reddish-brown breast on which there are *triangular blackish-brown* spots. I knew it as the blue thrush when a boy, from the colour of the back. It frequently utters a 'chack, chack, chack' as it flies, by which note you would at once know it (*see also* notes on song thrush in Part I, p. 20). The flesh of the missel thrush, like that of the

blackbird and song thrush, is good to eat and delicious. Missel thrushes nest very early. They pair in February and by April the eggs are laid. I do not think they have second nests. They build with much the same materials and in much the same places as thrushes and blackbirds but the nest is often in quite an exposed position, as seen in Plate XXXI, which shows a nest built in the thick main fork of an apple tree in an orchard, and about 8 feet from the ground. The nest is strong and larger than the thrush's and is very deep (about 4 inches). The eggs shown in the plate were raised purposely, for they are invisible unless the nest is looked into from above. They are from three to six in number, and of a greenish or reddish colour spotted reddish brown to purple. Whilst the materials of the nest are those of the song thrush, they often also use mud and bits of wool and cloth too if they can get it for the body of the nest or as a foundation. It is lined with moss and fine grass. It is very substantial. There is no clay round the inside, as used by the songthrush.

CHAPTER VIII

ADDENDA

DESCRIBING SOME OTHER BIRDS THAT MAY BE
FOUND NEAR LONDON AND OTHER LARGE TOWNS

THE *Yellow-hammer* or *Yellow Bunting*, is a bird that should be looked for in some districts near London, and is not rare. It is a little bigger than a sparrow, and has a rounded head which is yellow, as well as its neck, breast, and under parts, whilst the upper parts and sides are reddish-brown streaked with darker brown spots, and sparrow-like. The tail is dusky black. You will know it from a distance by its general colour, a bright brown, and the tail edged white. The flight is louping, and the bird alights with a flourish. Seen in sunlight the yellow is of a beautiful tint. The hen has the same but duller colours. Why the bird is called 'yellow' is evident, but the 'hammer' always puzzled

me until I found that the word is mis-spelt, and should be 'ammer' from the old Saxon *amore* meaning a bird. So it should be Yellow-ammer. But as it is a mark of want of education to leave out your h's the name has, I suppose, been corrupted. Another of its names is the Yellow Bunting, for it is really a bunting. It is a bird of the fields, hills, and woodlands, and the nest, which is open and cup-shaped and built of fine fibres, twigs and moss, and lined neatly with horsehair, is built at the latter end of April or May, on or near the ground in furze or brambles in a bank, and often in a tuft of grass. There are four or five eggs of a pale purplish white, streaked and spotted with reddish-brown. I believe there is a second nest later. The bird is a resident with us, and as early as February, when he commences mating, his pleasant busy notes are heard all over the country side, and all through the summer. They are spelt by some, 'chit chit,' or 'chit chit-chitt-chir-r-r (the *chits* quickly and the *chir* prolonged). Country people say they

sound like, ' Bit o' bread and no chee-e-e-se.' Certainly the ' chee-e-e-ese,' as he sits on the top of a bush in a low tree (*which is characteristic*) is distinct and cannot be mistaken. In winter they may be found in flocks with the common buntings, greenfinches and chaffinches, etc., looking for their food which is grain *whenever they can get it*, seeds, and also insects. The flocks remain together till pairing time. They often roost on the ground. If a flock be suddenly come upon they will disappear into the trees and bushes 'talking' constantly to each other and reassembling afterwards. The birds have a heavy look but a strong flight, and alight quickly, when the tail is jerked briskly. They sit more than they fly.

I have not mentioned *Hawks* nor *Owls*. The nests of both these species are hard to find, but both are built in fair numbers near London. Hawks build very high, and their nests are, therefore, of course inaccessible for photographs, unless you are equipped with a very long ladder or two, or can get above the nest or into another tree close by that does not

move about. Ted, who is a nimble climber, has often been up to them. Owls are night-flying birds, and are seldom seen in the day-time unless disturbed, and build in barns, old tree stumps, and the like.

First as to *hawks*. The *Sparrow-hawk* and the *Kestrel* are the only two that you would be likely, I think, to find near London. Of these two the *sparrow-hawk* is the *larger-looking bird* (the female being larger than the male) and the *commonest* (length 15 inches). This woodland-loving bird of prey is so called, I suppose, because of its special fondness for catching and eating sparrows, but it will capture *all* the birds smaller than itself it can get, too, as well as larger ones, such as pigeons, partridges, chickens, etc., requiring, it is said, three birds a day (more than 1,000 a year!) to satisfy its appetite! We may perhaps call it a fearless bird, but its habits in capturing others of its kind are generally stealthy and cat-like. And too, when it is mobbed by a crowd of smaller birds (all of which know and dread it, and

become bold only when they are all together) it will often do its best to get away from them. Hawks have to get above their prey and swoop *down on them* and strike them dead generally with the first blow of their talons. They glide along with an easy grace, mount up, and then swoop down suddenly when arrested by what they think to be a mouse, or a bird, and then glide on again if they be mistaken. The veriest tyro in natural history will recognize a hawk by its flight. The long tails give the birds the shape of a cross when flying. It is at the end of April or beginning of May that the hen sparrow-hawk lays her four to six eggs, of a greyish-white colour tinged with blue, and marked irregularly with blotches of deep brown. I have seen their nests, which are shallow and built carelessly, something like those of pigeons (*see* Part II, p. 59), of sticks and twigs, high up chiefly in poplars near London. They also build in other trees, in cliffs, and sometimes lay in the old nest of a magpie built high. *The female of this species is the larger (male*

12 inches long, *female* 15 inches), and the more fierce (for fierce is their characteristic). She alone it is said sits on the eggs though both male and female feed the young. I do not think there is more than one nest each season. *Plumage*: *Male*, upper parts dark bluish-grey, under parts reddish-white, barred transversely with dark brown. Tail grey, barred brownish black. *Female*, upper parts brown to blackish-grey, under parts greyish white, barred dark grey. *Note the difference in the plumage of the two sexes.*

The *Kestrel* (length 15 inches) is known from the sparrow-hawk by looking smaller and by its habit of hovering with quickly-flapping wings and its power of doing so against the wind, even though a gale be blowing, over whatever attracts its attention (hence its cognomens Windhover and Hoverer), and this is generally field mice or voles, for it does not as a rule, or perhaps ever, capture birds like the sparrow-hawk, nor is it so fierce a bird as the latter. The general colour of the *adult* bird (for it varies

somewhat when younger) is a dark lead or fawn grey, with a deep *blue* tint, barred with black, whilst the head also becomes blue with maturity. Altogether it is a lighter coloured bird than the sparrow-hawk, and as we have just noticed is smaller. It has a shrill and ringing note and also makes a sort of wailing noise (like a baby crying) when it sees its enemy, the stoat. It builds its nest in much the same positions as the sparrow-hawk. The eggs are four or five. They always stand out in a collection from the others by their deep reddish-brown colour—the colour is in blotches—all over them, as well as their size ($1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long). The above-mentioned hawks are resident in this country. You might very occasionally catch sight of a *Merlin* or a *Peregrine* falcon, both of the hawk family, the latter a large bird twice as large as a pigeon, the former only half the size of the *Peregrine*.

The Owls ¹.—The *Barn*, or *White Owl* is the

¹ In flight the *Barn Owl* looks tawny, whilst the *Brown* and the *Long-eared Owls* look drab, and the *Short-eared* (Woodcock) *Owl* looks brown (like the Woodcock).

commonest near London, and I think all through the country, and then comes the *Tawny* or *Brown* or *Wood* owl. There is also the *Long-eared Owl*; it is a resident, and inhabits woods. It has a cat-like cry. Colours, brown, buff, grey and black. *Eyes*, large and yellow; *flight*, buoyant. I do not think it is found near London. The *Little* owl is an imported and naturalized bird in England. The *Short-eared Owl* is a winter visitor, and is called the *Woodcock Owl* as it appears at the same time as that bird, and seldom perches in trees. It is of a brown appearance, length 15 inches. Tail, long and barred black. It often flies by day, and is often flushed by sportsmen when shooting in open fields. The length of these birds is from 14 to 16 inches. The *Barn Owl* is the shortest (14 inches). It is that *light tawny yellow*, exquisitely pencilled bird with a *white* face distinguishing it at once from the others. It is also the one that screeches and has been rhymed so much by poets, and figures in ghost and graveyard stories.

The *Tawny*, *Wood*, or *Brown Owl* is dark

brown coloured and the largest of the three (16 inches). (The *Long-eared* owl is also of a dark plumage but is known, when seen close especially, by its prominent ears.) A feature of owls is that all their parts are so delicately feathered, including the legs, that they can fly about (which they do in a dull and heavy manner) without making the slightest noise, the dreadful screeches of the barn owl (blood-curdling noises some people call them) being presumably to terrify its victims. I once heard a brown owl one quiet moonlight night about 12 o'clock in July, in North Wales, as he sat in the dark recesses of an old oak. The notes were most melancholy and weird, but yet attractive to the lover of nature at that still hour at the dead of night. His mate responded to him across the valley half a mile away. The notes of the tawny owl, not of a harsh kind, are generally spelt 'tu whit to whoo.' A Billericay friend of mine writes them 'Billy Hicks too whoo.'

I was attracted one afternoon in the suburbs of London by sounds which I thought were the snoring of a drunken tramp lying

somewhere. I searched everywhere, but could not find any one. Then on closer attention I traced the sounds to the turret of an old church close by, and found afterwards that they came from a barn owl that lived up there. (The young make a similar sound, which is their hunger cry, it is said.) Owls, as is well-known, feed on mice, rats and small birds, captured at night. Ted had a favourite singing skylark which he put out one night in its cage on the sill of the topmost window of the high old-fashioned house in which he lives. In the morning he found the poor bird dead and mangled. This must have been the work of an owl, and probably a brown owl, for we know where one lives and nests not very far away. It is in the stump of an old tree in a public park close by. I saw a barn owl one afternoon before it was dark, flying slowly (as they always do) over my garden at about twice the height of my house. Its slow flight, with body relatively short to the wings and the rounded ends of the wings told me at once it was an owl, and the greyish colour showed it to be a barn owl.

I have heard an owl screech at times at night near my house, when all is quiet and the babel of trams and motor cars has ceased. Barn owls like to build in barns (whence the name), but they also use old ruins, or the eaves of houses, and keep to the same spot year after year. They makes no particular nest, only gathering together perhaps a few odds and ends for the eggs. The tawny owl mostly prefers a hole in an old tree to nest in, especially if it be covered with ivy. (The *long-eared* owl is generally thought always to appropriate the nest of some other bird such as the magpie. This the tawny does sometimes also.) The tawny and long and short eared owls are birds of thickly grown dense woods with old ivy-covered trees. The barn owl's eggs are three to five, dull white and *almost round*. The tawny's are two to five, and also almost round, and of a dull white. (The long-eared owl's eggs are oval and white). Note the *white* colour of the eggs as in the case of most birds that nest in dark places or holes. Owls nest in March to April, and I believe do not

make second nests. A peculiarity of these birds is that they seem to require the fur and



XXXII : Hole in an old tree trunk in which an owl nested.

feathers of their victims to assist their digestion, these being thrown up as pellets after a

few hours. *Their holes may be located by finding these pellets*, which fall down to the ground. These owls remain in this country all the year.

The Tits.—I have so far described only the blue and the long-tailed tits, but all the three others, viz., the Great, the Marsh and the Cole Tit are found in good numbers near London. All are residents. There is a great similarity in these birds in their configuration and ways and *louping flight*. They are small birds, the bodies of the smallest not being larger than a walnut, but are covered with a profusion of loose feathers which make them fluffy and so they look larger. It is a pretty sight to see the parent tits with the young family pass down a hedge, all busily engaged in investigating each twig they flit to. They seem such a happy well-ordered little family, minding only their own business and not heeding you at all. They have the restless, busy ways peculiar to tits, continuously prying into every bit of leaf and bud and bark, and twisting themselves in every possible way to get at the insects and grubs there.

Your attention will very possibly be drawn

to them by their notes, and then you must look for them carefully for they are much hidden (unless it be winter time) amongst the foliage by the way in which they behave. They are all woodland birds. The largest of them is the *Great Tit* (6 inches long). Its notes, especially in early spring, at nesting time, may be spelt, 'peter, peter, peter,'¹ loudly and often repeated, and you cannot fail to hear them. It sits up more than the others, and is a decidedly bigger and sturdier bird in every way than the rest, almost equalling a cock-sparrow in size. The chest is yellow, and the body dark olive green. The head is black, with a large pure white *rounded* spot on the cheek.² Next in size is the *Long-tailed tit* (figured in Part I, p. 86 (length, $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches). It is not so gay in appearance, being of a grey brown, and deep blue-black colour in the body, head black fringed with white and *all the cheek and throat* white. *But it is its long tail*

¹ Or better 'teacha, teachla, teachla' (from the *Country Side*). It has other notes also.

² From which it receives the name of the ox-eye. General colour, greenish and grey. It will sometimes kill and eat the brains of smaller birds.

that marks it out at once, and it keeps it straight down *always* to balance itself. The tail is black, the two outer feathers showing white all the way down. Notes, 'chee, chee, chee,' a weak little cheeping. The body is long and bottle-shaped (Bottle Tit).

Next comes the *Blue Tit* or *Tomtit*) (described in Part I, pp. 33-6), length, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It is a gay-looking bird *of a notably blue colour* (whence name); head, wings and tail blue. The body is oval, and *yellow in front*. (The tints of the tits that live always in the country are much brighter than those that frequent smoky towns and especially London gardens. So that even the *blue Tit*, the blue being of a beautiful shade, may not be at once recognized in the suburbs.) Notes, like the long-tailed tit, a cheeping. The 'chee, chee, chee,' (or 'twee, twee, twee') is feeble and constant. It is the little fellow that often nests and one so often sees in London gardens throughout the year. (Best seen when the leaves are off the trees.) When you hear the little 'twee, twee, twee' look for the bird. It is very fond of maize, out of which it eats only the eye, and

also of suet or fat which may be hung up to attract it (*see* Part I, pp. 33-6).

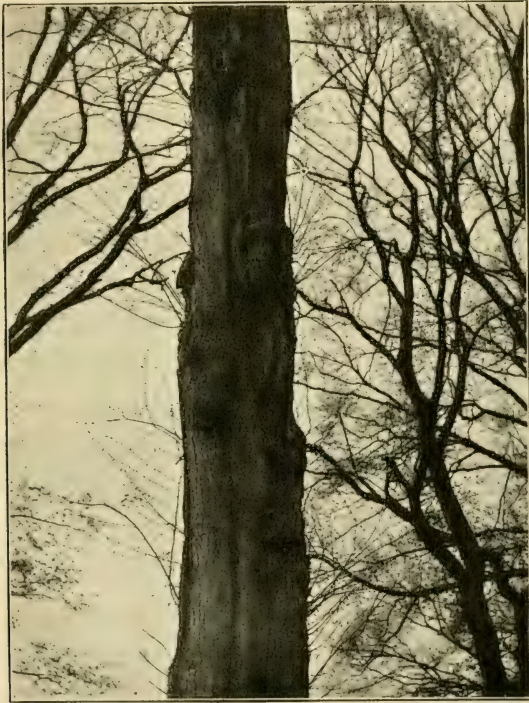
Then there is the *Marsh Tit*, the same size and shape as the blue, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It has sober plumage, wings bluish-grey, back brown, under parts white. The head also is black and the cheek white to the back of the neck. Notes : the same as the two former ones. It is not confined to marshes as its name would imply. Lastly comes the little *Coal Tit*, another sober-coloured bird, slate grey, brown and deep blue-black, which is only $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches long and resembles the marsh tit. (Often spelt cole, as if named after a person, in error, the name being taken from its colours.) The head is black and the cheek white, *but there is a white spot on the back of the head, which distinguishes it from the marsh tits*, wings bluish-grey with two white transverse bars, under parts greyish-white. Notes, 'chee, chee, chee, chee,' as with the others, a shrill perpetually uttered cheeping, especially when many are together. It looks of a slate grey colour with a black and white head.

Reviewing the five tits we have two some-

what gay coloured ones, the *Great*, and the *Blue*, whilst the others are sober tinted. They all (except the blue-headed Blue Tit) have black heads and more or less white cheeks. The great tit is considerably the biggest and has a yellow chest. The long-tailed tit has the long tail, the blue tit is the only one that is markedly bright blue with a yellow front. It is only the great tit that utters the 'peter, peter, peter' (whilst the others have the metallic 'chee, chee, chee,' etc., notes). It looks greenish and grey, with a black and white head. The blue, marsh and coal tits are much alike in shape. Distinguish the marsh tit from the coal tit, which it much resembles, by the white spot at the back of the head.

The nests and eggs of the tits. The *Long-tailed Tit* makes the beautiful bottle or coconut-shaped domed nest covered with lichen (figured on p. 152 and in Part I, p. 86). The others build in holes, in stumps of trees and the like, sometimes low, often high up, an open rounded nest, generally with a very small hole of entrance to it in the tree, so that the hand cannot be got in, and there is plenty of

grass and other material to fill up the hole. (Nest boxes for tits in gardens have the hole



XXXIII : Tree trunk full of holes in which a colony of blue tits nested.

only just big enough to admit these birds so that the larger starlings and sparrows, etc.,

which also like these boxes to build in, may not be able to get into them.) The great tit, especially, collects much material in its nest hole. The blue tit (tomtit) will sometimes choose all sorts of odd places to build in, as an old bottle, a pump, letter-box, etc., selecting something with a small hole of entrance. The materials of the nests are grasses chiefly. They are lined with grass, moss, feathers, hair and wool. The nest of the blue tit is very elegant. Tits build in spring and may have more than one nest each year. *The numbers and colours of the eggs of these birds are: Great Tit*, six to nine, white with large spots and specks of red. *Long-tailed Tit*, ten to twelve (or more), white with a few specks of red. *The smallest egg of all the British birds. Blue Tit*, seven or eight (or more), pinky white, spotted most at the larger end with reddish brown. *Marsh Tit*, five to eight, white, spotted red. *Coal Tit*, six to eight, also white, spotted red.

The pheasant is a familiar preserved wood and spinny inhabiting bird, and is found near

most towns. It was introduced into this country many centuries ago. The eggs are often hatched under hens. As soon as October 1st has arrived (the date on which the shooting of the 'long tails,' as sportsmen call them, commences) rows of them are seen in our poulterers' shops. The cock is a handsome fellow, measuring almost 3 feet from the tip of the beak to the end of the tail, and boasts of scarlet, green, blue, yellow, red, purple and black in his plumage. The green iridescent neck stands out sharply. The female is only of a light brown, dusky marked colour. I have before mentioned the cock's note, by which he betrays his whereabouts if approached. It is a single discordant warning 'craa-k.' The female gives a shrill piping whistle. The nests are carefully watched by keepers, and it is difficult to get a photograph of one, as these valuable game birds must not be disturbed. The nest is built on the ground in much the same positions as those of partridges (which see, p. 65) and like them too are loosely made of sticks, stalks, and grass. Eggs, six to ten, or

more, of a uniform olive brown, with very small dots all over them. In the spring the cock selects a batch of hens as his breeding mates.

There are several other birds that may be found sometimes near London and large towns, some of which nest there too. These I will briefly describe.

The Golden-crested Wren or Gold Crest, a little resident bird, the smallest of all the British birds, length $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches (though the long-tailed tit lays the smallest eggs). It is something like the common (Jenny) wren (see Part I, p. 84) and has its restless little habits, or perhaps rather those of the tits. It takes its name from its crest, which is bright yellow-orange (golden). The upper parts are a yellowish olive and the wings greyish-brown with two transverse white bands.

The *Fire crest* is a very similar bird except for the crest, which is a brilliant red (hence name). It is a visitor to this country. The golden-crested wren builds in March, a beautiful *hanging* nest of moss and dry grass with

cobwebs. Look for it *under* the branches of a yew or more specially a fir, which are both evergreens where it is almost always situated. The eggs are six to ten pale yellowish white spotted red most at the larger end.

The Nuthatch, a resident (length $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches), must be looked for to be seen, for it conceals itself much, mostly keeping close to the bark of trees and generally go about in couples (like the woodpeckers). It is about the size of a sparrow, soft grey above, dull cream below, and very pretty with a beautiful outline of figure. It has the creeping habits of the woodpeckers or the creeper. Though the body is kept low the head is raised. Call notes spelt, ' whit, whit, whit ' often repeated (but only during nesting time in spring). Flight louping as it flies from tree to tree. It has the habit also of sitting quite still sometimes as if making observations. Its notes will attract you. Nests in holes in trees generally. If the hole be too big it plasters it up with mud. Synonyms: *Mud-stopper*, *Woodcracker*, *Nutjobber* (stores up nuts like

squirrels, and opens them with a loud rapping noise which may be heard quite a long distance off, *and also attracts attention*).

The Siskin is a pretty little yellow and black *winter visitor*, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, with something of the habits of the blue tit (tomtit), and looks something like a very lively little goldfinch, *but is of a greenish tint*.¹ Many are caught in autumn and winter for keeping in cages (out of the small flocks that come south), for its appearance and pretty little titterings, for this is all its song. They are occasionally seen near London and are very fond of alder trees. It sometimes nests in Scotland in pine-fir woods, rarely farther south.

The Brambling, or Mountain Finch, comes near London sometimes. It is a *winter visitor* only and arrives in September and October and flies about in flocks alone or with the chaffinches and greenfinches and linnets. It is very fond of beech woods and the beech seeds (beech mast). It is of a robust appearance, length 6 inches (about). The plumage

¹ The males show much bright yellow on wings and tails in flight.

is variegated, black, white and buff. In the field they resemble chaffinches, but the markings are different.¹ They chirp and twitter much, and the combined efforts of a flock make quite a noise. Kept in an aviary they are often heard to utter a sort of screech, by night as well as by day.

The Goldfinch (length 5 inches) may be sometimes seen wild near London. It is found in numbers mostly where weeds (especially thistles, groundsel, dandelion, etc.) are abundant, as it feeds chiefly on the seeds of various wild plants. Every one must know this, perhaps the most handsome of British birds, by sight, for they are often seen in cages. Though very elegant in form and of lovely plumage, they have no song proper, only sweet twitterings and call notes. The sharp little beak stands out from blood-red and white cheeks, which are followed backwards by black edged with brown. The wings are black and bright yellow, with white marks on the black, under parts white, back brown, tail black

¹ Wings chequered, flight dipping, and show white above the tail.

tipped white. It builds, too, a beautiful regularly circular open cup-shaped nest (its first nest is in spring) which much resembles the chaffinch's (see Part II, p. 168), and often three or four each year. It is composed of twigs, grass, roots, wool, moss and pretty lichens outside and is lined with horsehair, inside of which again are the soft parts of the ripe seeds (pappus) of the weeds it chiefly feeds on, for the eggs. After nesting (late summer) the old birds and their largely-increased families hatched during the year, fly about together feeding. *Most migrate but some remain with us all the year*, and some come to us from the Continent in the spring. The eggs are four or five, pale greenish-blue, streaked brown and purple at the larger end. An apple tree in an orchard is a favourite site for the nest, but they build also in oaks and other trees, or in bushes, and pick out the lichen from trunks of trees for their nests.

The Wheatear (length $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches). I have sometimes seen solitary specimens of this bird near London, in spring, individuals on passage to other parts further out, and in autumn

there on their return journey before leaving us, for they are *migrants*. They are birds of wastes, open downs and ploughed fields far away from human habitations. I used to be very familiar with them in winter on distant commons in Guernsey, as they catch the eye at once by the large amount of white they show flying away from you with expanded tail, in a characteristic jerky sort of way. They also run on the ground. The flesh is good eating. The bird is of a sturdy appearance and if you can catch a sight of one as it sits on a wall, stone or stump, you will see that it has a nervous attentive manner, and keeps the wings somewhat draggled and the tail drooping a little. The name of the bird has nothing to do with wheat, but is derived from an old Saxon word sounding like wheat, and which implies that the bird is keen of ear or hearing (*wheatear*). The upper parts are bluish-grey, and the wings and *tip* of tail black, the before-mentioned white on the rump and upper part of the tail underneath contrasting strongly with its extremity. Under parts white. They nest in March or April, on a heap

of stones, in a quarry, or on some low old wall, and sometimes in a disused rabbit burrow. The nest is open and cup-shaped, and made of grass and wool, and lined with hair, fur, and feathers. Eggs: five or six, light blue, occasionally white, without spots. There are two varieties of wheatear, the one described, and the greater wheatear, which arrives in April.

The Blackcap (length $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches) is a widely-distributed *summer visitor*. It is often seen near the Metropolis, but does not, I think, nest except well out in the country. The head *of the males* on the top is jet black (blackcap) *chocolate in the female*. Upper part, wings and tail, grey, tinged blue; throat and breast grey, under parts white. Female somewhat larger than the male. It is one of the warblers and has a most beautiful song (the throat being much distended whilst singing), rivalling, and in the opinion of some excelling that of the nightingale. Unfortunately (unlike the sedge and reed-warblers), it stops singing immediately you

approach it, for it is very shy and timid, and loves dense thickets. Nest in *end of May* (which is late), in honeysuckle brambles, or a low bush, frail and deep (like those of the sedge and reed-warblers) made of fine grass and roots, and some hair and wool.

The Redpoll (length $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches). This *winter visiting* finch is a familiar bird in the shops of bird-catchers, who net very many of them on waste lands and commons (where they are found chiefly) in autumn and winter. They are very fond of birch trees. They are very favourite and cheap aviary and cage birds, and are kept more for their sprightly little ways than their plumage, which is sober, or their notes, which are merely a soft 'pee weet.' They also become very tame and are easily taught the trick of hauling up their seed in a bucket. In the wild state they somewhat resemble the tits in their acrobatic performances.¹ As the name implies they have red polls, that is, the *males* have, their breasts also being of a pleasing red. The colours are much less marked in the females,

¹ Go about in companies, constantly twittering.

and in both they go off considerably in captivity. The older birds show the best colours. Sides brown with dark streaks, under parts white, wings and tail dusky brown.¹ They breed chiefly in the north of England and Scotland.

The Meadow Pipit or *Titlark* (length $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches). I have sometimes seen this bird near London. It is a plainly-coloured bird of a small, skylark-like appearance *in plumage* (*tit-lark*, *small lark*, like *tit-mouse*), being ash-grey tinted olive in the upper parts, each feather here having a dark brown centre, under parts dull greyish-white, with long spots of darker brown. Tail long ($2\frac{1}{2}$ inches), dark brown. But though skylark-like even to singing whilst hovering near the nest, they nowadays are classed with the wagtails. And if you look at them you will see they are smaller than skylarks (skylark, $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches) and sit much like a wagtail and frisk their tails. They are good runners, too, like them. The flight also is more wagtail-like. The note is

¹ Colour in flight, dark brown. Flight swift and dipping.

a gentle 'peep' which if you once hear you will know again. *Most migrate but return at the end of Februray.* Nests in April, on the ground, or in a tuft of grass, or in a bank (like the wagtails, which see, p. 129), and sometimes on the sea beach. (I have seen many of the birds in Guernsey.) Two or three nests each year.

The Woodcock (length 14 inches) is a winter visitor, arriving in October to November. It is long-beaked and like a snipe (but much larger), and is mottled brown and black.¹ (Breeds, but rarely in some parts of England and Ireland.) Much sought after by sportsmen. Flesh a delicacy. Flight rapid and very erratic, making it very difficult to shoot (compare the jack and the full snipe, Part II, pp. 53 and 56).

There are other birds also which you may occasionally see near London, or provincial towns, though not breeding near London, so far as I know. *They are met with as birds of passage to other parts of the country.* These I will briefly mention.

¹ In flight its tail looks short compared to the wings.

The Grasshopper Warbler (length $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches). So named because it makes a grasshopper-like note, 'tic, tic.' Upper parts brown and mottled, under parts pale brown. A timid *migratory bird*, concealing itself much and therefore little known.

The Hawfinch (length 7 inches). A robust, large and powerful-beaked, heavy-looking bird of a brown, reddish-brown, black and white plumage. So named because of its love for berries, and chiefly the hips and haws of the may. *The strong beak is a notable feature.* A *resident*, but altering its locality much.

The Crossbill (length $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches). One of other similar species ; *migratory*, rarely seen in England. We have seen two north of London. The *adult male* is of a dull red colour in the head, body and wings, tail brown. Head and beak parrot-like, but the upper and lower parts of the beak (mandibles) are curved, and cross each other, acting like a saw when put in motion. It uses its beak for feeding upon seeds of various kinds or extracting the kernels, but lives chiefly on pine cones, and in mountain pine forests.

The Stonechat (length 5 inches). A lively little *resident* bird, which is black and brown, with a reddish breast, and marked with white on the throat, wings and rump. It loves open stony places (whence name) and furze bushes. Notes, 'chat, chat, chat.' Takes flies in the air like the flycatcher. There is also the *Whinchat* (length $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches), something like the stonechat in many ways. It is a *summer visitor*.

The Redwing (length $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches). The smallest of our thrushes. A *winter visitor only*. Great numbers are seen and shot in Guernsey, driven south by cold. Plumage brown above, whitish below, with the brown spots of the thrush (see Part I, p. 19) on the breast. *Front of wings* red (whence name). A *distinct light line over the eye*. They go about in flocks in winter. Note, 'chee-ee-a, chee-ee-a,' uttered during flight which is straight. (The *Fieldfare*, mentioned before, often seen feeding in fields in winter in flocks like the redwings, is bigger and of a bluish tint. It too has a *straight* flight but utters a 'chak, chak, chak,' on the wing.)

The Tree Pipit (length 6 inches). A *migrant*

much like the meadow pipit (*see* p. 194) in plumage and habits. Note as it rises from a tree only to perch again quickly or as it flits from tree to tree, 'tsee, tsee' repeated many times.

The Water-Rail (length 11½ inches). Most remain with us all the year. A very shy, marsh-loving bird, seldom seen unless put out of reeds or other water plants by dogs. Resembles somewhat the moorhen (which *see*) but has a narrower body, and flies like it with legs stretched out behind, but is more like the sleek landrail (or corncrake, *see* below) both in shape and plumage and croaking note. Plumage, olive brown above, cheeks, neck and breast grey, flanks barred white. Flesh edible, and delicious.

The Land-rail or Corncrake (length 11 inches). A *summer visitor*. Another bird seldom seen, but often heard in the cornfields. It runs much from place to place, and its 'crake, crake' notes repeated many times seem now here and now there.¹ (I do not be-

¹ They may be imitated by rubbing the finger along the teeth of a good sized comb, in one direction, several times.

lieve it has any powers of ventriloquism often ascribed to it.) Something like a sleek part-ridge in shape and plumage (*see* also water-rail). Colours: yellowish-brown with darker brown spots all over; under parts lighter.

The Nightjar (length $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches). A *summer visitor*, seldom observed as it *flies only at night*, spending the day crouched on the ground or on a branch with the tail touching what it is sitting on. Something like a large swallow in shape and its swift movements, but plumage grey, light and dark brown, spotted and barred black. Beak short and *gape wide* with hairs in the broad mouth to secure insects on flight. Note spelt, 'jar-r-r-r-r-r' (nightjar) uttered on the wing. (Two notes spelt 'teh, tek,' *uttered at night*, have been variously assigned to the nightjar feeding on insects, the moorhen on nocturnal migration, the owl and bats. They are most probably owls' notes.¹) I have more than once in Guernsey mistaken this bird *at dusk* for a

¹ But perhaps more than one kind of bird utters this same note at night.

woodcock when flying over a hedge, the dark plumage and way of popping over a hedge deceiving me.

The *Twite* (length $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches) called also the Mountain Linnet, is sometimes seen in bird-catchers' shops in the winter. It is a *winter visitor*. It is very much like a linnet but is *distinguished at once by its yellow beak*.

The Corn Bunting or Common Bunting (length $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches), a *resident*, not confined to cornfields as its name would imply. A heavy, sober-coloured bird bigger than but something like a sparrow, and very sedentary in its habits. Upper parts yellowish brown with dusky spots, under parts yellowish white with dusky streaks. The notes have been likened to the breaking of glass. In winter they may be found in flocks, and associate with greenfinches, chaffinches, and sparrows. (There are also other Buntings.) The flesh is edible.

Golden Plover (length 11 inches, flesh edible). Size, between a blackbird and a pigeon. Brown birds, spotted, when seen close, with

yellow. Wings sharp pointed, flight swift. *Come down in winter from the Arctic regions.* Seen in flocks often with peewits, whistle softly on the wing. Rare near London.

I must mention the *Seagulls*. Some species of these birds are familiar to Londoners proper, as many are seen out of their nesting-time on the Thames, even up to and above London Bridge. Those chiefly seen there are the *Common Gull*, the *Herring Gull*, the *Black-headed Gull* and the *Kittiwake*, all residents in this country. They nest many miles away upon or near the sea-coasts. In the environs of London some or other of them, sometimes only one at a time, may often be observed on our large waters, reservoirs and streams, or flying overhead, a sure sign that it is stormy at the coast. Further in the country, not far from the sea generally, they are often seen feeding on ploughed fields when not away nesting in summer time. Here their pure white bodies contrasting so strongly with the dark, *newly-turned* soil which has attracted them for food, make

them visible from a great distance. Gulls are all web-footed birds. Of the above-mentioned the *Herring Gull* is the largest, length 24 inches; next the *Common Gull*, $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches, then the *Black-headed Gull*, 16 inches, and last the little Kittiwake, only $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The *Herring Gull* follows shoals of herrings, hence the name. It feeds on everything it can, including offal and carrion. In summer the plumage of the adult bird is much like that of the summer plumage of the adult common gull (for in winter the colours of gulls are darker, and young gulls are brown), that is head and body a pure white, wings a delicate grey (pale bluish in the common gull), but the tips of the wings are black edged white, whilst in the common gull the white here is patchy, and the tips brownish black. The *Black-headed Gull* has a red beak and red legs, and it is also the largest of these gulls and the black head, too, is distinctive. The adult has the pure white gull body, and the grey or bluish-grey wings, margined with black. In winter the

black head nearly disappears. *The Kittiwake* is so called from its notes, two quick and short, and the last long, and it is distinctly the smallest. Otherwise it resembles the common and herring gulls. All of us must be acquainted with the melancholy cries of the common gull, a prolonged 'two-oo-dle, oodle, oodle, oodle' (as I spell it), uttered generally on the wing, and also a 'squeal,' the call note to the others as one has discovered something to feed on, and they have very long and keen vision. I can boast of being able to closely imitate the 'two-oo-dle' cry, by working the tongue about against the palate, whilst whistling a continuous mournful note. What beautiful birds are the seagulls—who could shoot one !

The *Greater or Common Curlew* (length 24 to 26 inches), and the *Lesser Curlew* (or *Whimbrel*) (length 17 to 18 inches), *resident*, greyish birds spotted brown with long, curved beaks and long legs will be known to Londoners only as they fly over (either on their way to nesting haunts or changing their feeding

grounds) chiefly at night, by the note uttered one to the other to keep together in the darkness, and which is like a human being whistling to attract another's attention, only more drawn out, a 'phoo-oo-eet' (quicker if alarmed, and often repeated very hurriedly when one bird reaches a flock, when feeding in sand or mud flats, as if rejoicing that it had got to them).

Lastly, of sea birds that may sometimes be seen running on the shores of rivers, streams and waters (where some remain sometimes for weeks at a time in autumn and winter up to the nesting season in spring when they leave for the northern parts of the country) there are the *Common Sandpiper* (length 8 inches), the *Sanderling* (8 inches), the *Dunlin* (7 to 8 inches) and the *Dotterel* (9 inches). These are birds somewhat after the style of the redshanks (see p. 105) or the full and jack snipe (see Part II, pp. 53-6). The *Common Sandpipers*, or perhaps the *Dunlins*, are the ones mostly seen near towns. The *Common Sandpiper* or *Summer Snipe*

(length 8 inches), a *summer* visitor, is the bird with curved snipe-like wings, brownish back, and white under parts, and quick snipe-like (but hesitating) flight, that keeps flying on before you and pitching again, or crosses to the other side of the water as you approach, and utters a 'wheet, wheet, wheet.' (There are varieties of this bird.) The *Sanderling*, a *winter* visitor (length 8 inches) whistles continuously as it flies right away. The plumage is lighter than that of the sandpiper. The note of the *Dunlin* (length 7 to 8 inches) spelt 'kwee, kwee' is uttered on first taking flight, or running on the pebbles or sand. It is the commonest of these birds in this country. It has a reddish, black streaked crown, the throat and upper breast are greyish-white and striped, wings black and grey. The *Dotterell* (9 inches), a *summer* visitor, has black, white, brown and red plumage. Notes feeble and soft, some compare them to the linnet's, spelt, 'durr, droo.'

All these birds are found in flocks in various parts at the seaside, especially in winter.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMMON BIRDS MENTIONED IN THIS WORK
DIVIDED INTO GROUPS TO AID IN THEIR
RECOGNITION.

I HAVE now described in the three parts of this work (omitting the Addenda occupying pages 166-205,) fifty-two of the *commonest* birds, with their nests and eggs, found near London, and these we have discovered during three seasons, with limited time at our disposal. I will now group these as an aid to their recognition. *These lists are not absolute, but are intended to indicate how birds may be classified in the mind.*

GROUP I.—*Common birds, easily recognized, and, I would think, known to all who have any love for natural history. These would not have to be looked for specially, though finding their nests would imply some knowledge of*

their haunts. (It must be remembered, too, that birds' *nests* will only be found *during the nesting season*, commencing in early spring, as before detailed, a very few nesting almost up to autumn, if the weather keeps moderate.)

(A) *Woodland and field birds*: Blue Tit, Cuckoo, House-sparrow, Long-tailed Tit, Starling, Song Thrush, Common (Jenny) Wren, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Hedge-sparrow, House-martin, Jackdaw, Robin, Rook, Stock-dove, Swallow, Swift, Wood-pigeon (Ringdove), Skylark, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail. (B) *Found near water or in marshy districts* (some of these may not be so well known): Reed-bunting, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Moorhen, Sedge-warbler, Reed-warbler, Swan, Wild Duck (Mallard), Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail.

GROUP II.—*Birds familiar to many of us, but generally speaking not recognized until after some special study of the subject*:

(A) *Woodland and field birds*: Creeper, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nightingale, Wryneck, Bullfinch, Great Tit,

Carrion Crow, Spotted Flycatcher, Turtle-dove, Whitethroat, Willow-wren, Butcher-bird, Chiffchaff, Greenfinch, Hooded Crow, Jay, Magpie, Missel Thrush, Linnet, Redstart, Yellowhammer. (B) *Found near water, or in marshy districts*: Coot, Full Snipe, Jack Snipe, Reed-warbler, Heron, Redshank, and some other sea birds in the rare list (see pp. 204-5), Wagtails.

GROUP III.—*Birds that often build in gardens or on houses, cottages, or on outbuildings*: Blue Tit (Tom-tit), Creeper, House-sparrow, Starling, Song Thrush, Common (Jenny) Wren, Wryneck, Blackbird. Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Hedge-sparrow, House-martin, Robin, Spotted Flycatcher, Swallow, Swift. (Of these the following are the birds that you would most likely find nesting on houses, cottages or outbuildings: House-sparrow, Starling, House-martin, Swallow.)

GROUP IV.—*Birds that are rare, some very so, near London, but the nests of which we have found in secluded or strictly-preserved places*: Pochard, Wild Duck (Mallard), Carrion Crow,

Coot, Full Snipe, Great Grebe, Lesser Grebe, Heron, Wigeon.

GROUP V.—*Birds that are resident in this country, and may be found all the year round :* Reed-bunting, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Creeper, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, House-sparrow, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Long-tailed Tit (some remain all the year), Starling, Swan, Song Thrush, Wild Duck (Mallard), Common (Jenny) Wren, Blackbird, Bullfinch, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch (many remain), Coot, Full Snipe (a few remain), Hedge-sparrow, Jackdaw, Robin, Rook, Stock-dove, Wood-pigeon (Ringdove), Greenfinch, Heron, Hooded Crow, Jay, Magpie, Missel Thrush, Linnet, Nuthatch, English and French Partridges, Redshank, Skylark, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Yellowhammer, Corn Buntings, Pheasant, Kestrel, Sparrow Hawk, the *Owls*, (except the short-eared). It will thus be seen that many birds may be found in the country even in winter, and in the rare list (pp. 186-204) are some that are winter visitors only.

GROUP VI.—*Summer visitors only, arriving*

in the spring and leaving again in the autumn, and coming to this country for nesting : Cuckoo, Nightingale, Sedge-warbler, Wryneck, House-martin, Reed-warbler, Sand-martin, Spotted Flycatcher, Swallow, Swift, Turtle-dove, Whitethroat, Willow-wren, Butcher-bird, Chiffchaff, Redstart, Yellow Wagtail.

GROUP VII.—*Birds that make open cup-shaped nests in trees or bushes, or in hedges, etc.* Reed-bunting, Cuckoo (lays in the nests of other but small birds), Moorhen (rarely in bushes), Nightingale, Sedge-warbler, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Bullfinch, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Hedge-sparrow, Reed-warbler, Robin, Rook, Spotted Flycatcher, White-throat, Butcher-bird, Greenfinch, Hooded Crow, Jay, Missel Thrush, Linnet, Redstart, Yellow hammer.

GROUP VIII.—*Birds that build (almost always) on the ground :* Lapwing, Moorhen, Swan, Wild Duck (Mallard), Coot, Full Snipe, Chiffchaff (near the ground), Partidges, Redshank, Skylark, Wagtails, Wigeon, Pheasant. Of these the Moorhen, Swan,

Wild Duck, Coot, Skylark, Wagtails and Wigeon shape their nests well, the others being rough, and the Chiffchaff's roofed.

GROUP IX.—*Birds that generally build IN HOLES in trees or trunks*: Blue, Coal, Great and Marsh Tits (not the Long-tailed Tit), Creeper, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Starling (not exclusively), Wryneck, Owls.

GROUP X.—*Birds that build domed nests*: House-sparrow (domed if in a tree), Long-tailed Tit, Willow-wren, Chiffchaff (better described as a hooded nest), Magpie (a roofed rather than a domed nest).

GROUP XI.—*Birds (the common ones mentioned in this book) that build nests other than the easily seen open regularly cup-shaped ones, and more or less peculiar*: Blue, Great Coal and Marsh Tits *rounded nests*, but in a hole in a tree or elsewhere, with plenty of material in the hole; *Creeper*, in a hole in a tree; *Cuckoo*, lays in other birds' open cup-shaped nests; *Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker*, in holes in trees or trunks; *House-sparrow*, a domed nest if in a tree, not

so well-shaped under eaves, etc. ; *Kingfisher*, at the bottom of a long hole in a bank of a stream ; *Lapwing*, a rough nest on the ground, sometimes only a depression ; *Long-tailed Tit*, a beautiful domed nest with lichen outside, and one or two holes for entrance and exit ; *Starling*, a mass of material in some hole or crack, in trees or gutters, etc. ; *Swan*, a large heaped-up nest on the ground ; *Wild Duck (Mallard) and other ducks*, little material sometimes, on the ground, and cover eggs with down when the whole clutch is laid ; *Common (Jenny) Wren*, a domed nest of various materials, often with lichen outside, sometimes of grass, etc., only ; *Wryneck*, in a hole in a tree ; *Coot*, a heaped-up nest on the ground, almost flat at the top or floating ; *Moorhen*, ditto ; *Full Snipe*, a rather careless nest on the ground ; *House-martin*, of clay pellets hanging under eaves of houses ; *Jackdaw*, a rough piled-up nest with plenty of material ; *Sand-martin*, in a cavity at the end of a hole in a sand bank ; *Nuthatch*, builds in a hole in a tree, etc. ; *Stock-dove*, *Woodpigeon (Ring-*

dove) and *Turtle-dove*, a flat nest of sticks ; *Swallows*, like the *House-martin*, or more usually pork-pie shaped on a rafter, etc. ; *Swift*, little or no materials in a crack high up ; *Willow-wren*, a domed nest of various materials ; *Chiffchaff*, a domed (or rather hooded) nest of grass, etc., on the ground ; *Heron*, a large flat heaped-up nest in high trees ; *Magpie*, a large roofed nest of sticks, with a hole for entrance in high trees generally, but sometimes low ; *Partridges and Pheasants*, rough nests of grass and sticks on the ground ; *Redshank*, a rough nest on the ground ; *Skylark*, a well-formed nest on the ground ; *Wag-tails*, like *Skylark*, but mostly in banks in grass ; *Owls*, careless, scanty nests, in buildings (*Barn Owl*) and holes in tree trunks, etc. ; *Hawks*, flat, shapeless nests high up in trees.

GROUP XII.—*Birds smaller than a Sparrow* : *Blue Tit* (*Tomtit*), *Long-tailed Tit*, *Marsh and Coal Tits*, *Creeper*, *Sedge-warbler*, *Common* (*Jenny*) *Wren*, *Reed-warbler*, *Sand-martin*, *Spotted Flycatcher*, *Willow-wren*, *Chiffchaff*, *Siskin*, *Gold-crest*.

GROUP XIII.—*Birds about the size of a sparrow, but not so big as a blackbird or a thrush* : Reed Bunting, Nightingale, Wryneck, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Hedge-sparrow, Jack Snipe (larger than a Sparrow), Robin, House-martin, Swallow and Swift, Whitethroat, Butcher-bird (bigger than a Sparrow), Greenfinch, Linnet, Redstart, Skylark, Yellowhammer, Wagtails (tails long and constantly wagged up and down), Goldfinch, Brambling, Redpole, Twite, Corn Bunting (larger).

GROUP XIV.—*Birds about the size of a Blackbird or a Thrush* : Green Woodpecker (larger), Kingfisher (smaller), Starling, Full Snipe, Missel Thrush (larger).

GROUP XV.—*Birds bigger than a Blackbird or Thrush, but not so big as a Rook or a Carrion Crow* : Cuckoo, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Lapwing, Moorhen, Coot, Jackdaw, Stockdove, Ringdove (Woodpigeon), Turtle-dove (the smallest of the pigeons), Jay, Magpie, Partridges, Pheasant, Redshank, Lesser Grebe.

GROUP XVI.—*Birds of the Duck tribe, and all about the same size* : Wild Duck (Mallard), Wigeon, Pochard.

GROUP XVII.—*Large birds, larger than a Rook*: Great Grebe (between a duck and a goose), Heron (3 feet high), Hooded Crow (larger than a rook).

GROUP XVIII.—*Birds of many coloured or gay plumage*: Blue Tit, Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kingfisher, Long-tailed Tit, Wild Duck (Mallard) *male*, Jay, Pheasant, Pochard (male), Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Yellow-hammer.

GROUP XIX.—*Birds that are found in smaller or larger flocks in the winter*: Sparrows (especially in the country), Lapwings (generally in low-lying parts), Starlings, Wild Ducks (near water or in marshes), Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Linnets (these three are often together). House-martins, Swallows, Swifts, Sand-martins (these four are in flocks mostly at migration time in October). Jackdaws, Rooks, Pigeons, Turtle-doves (small flocks), Missel Thrushes (small flocks), Partridges (coveys). Sandpipers, Dunlins, Sanderlings, Dotterels, Curlews, Sea-gulls, Redshanks (these, and there are others, are seaside birds).

Goldfinches, Linnets (often with Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Twites or Bramblings). Yellowhammers, Skylarks, Hooded Crows (small wandering companies), Golden Plover (rare, and mostly near the sea or in lowlands).

The following are winter visitors only, coming south from the north or from the Continent, or both: Siskins, Fieldfares, Redwings (thrushes), Redpolls, Corn Buntings, Twites (which are very like linnets, but have yellow beaks, and often associate with them) these all assemble in flocks in the winter. Full Snipe (often large numbers are found together, a few remaining to breed).

I will conclude with a few hints.—In learning to recognize the different birds when seen in the field, the following points should be borne in mind :—

Birds frequent *favourite localities*, often *favourite spots*, and even *favourite kinds of trees*, etc., where they may generally be found. It is only when seen quite close that the *smaller differences in plumage* can be seen. From a distance many, especially the more sober

plumaged birds can only be recognized by their *sizes, general colour, mode of flight, manners, postures, and notes*, and these characteristics, especially the notes, can only be got by practice, though to read them all up is of the greatest use.

The *males* of most species differ more or less in plumage and size from the *females*.

The *immature plumage of all young birds* is different to that of the *adult*, and the size, of course, of the young is less.

The *winter plumage* of many birds differs from that of the spring (breeding-time) and summer.

The characteristic *mode of flight, plumage, mannerisms, notes and sizes* of the birds never vary (albinism and freaks are rare).

The *materials of the nests* of a few birds may vary, the nearest at hand being *sometimes* utilized, but the large majority always use the same materials.

The *shape, and outside and inside measurements* (especially the latter) *of the nests* are constant, and typical, so that after some prac-

tice a nest may often be recognized at once *from below*, but even the most experienced may be sometimes wrong. The locality, position (tree, bush, bank, etc.), and average height of the nest, the shape, size, markings and number (when the full clutch is laid) of the eggs (and these are all fairly constant) as well as *the birds seen to belong to the nest* (if possible), must be taken into account before a decision is arrived at.

Eggs of all birds vary somewhat (study museum specimens for this) in size, shades of colour, distribution of the spots (and even their contour). But those *without spots* do not vary much in shade. The *number of the full clutch* is almost always constant. That of *second and third nests* may vary. Eggs are difficult to name, even from the best coloured drawings, or photographs, though photographs show well the *general appearances of nests*. Read up all the points of the birds and familiarize yourself with the photographs of them, especially *good* ones of *living* specimens, or *reliable* coloured drawings. Visit museums,

and get to know the stuffed birds and their eggs at sight. But remember that a **bird** sitting looks very different to one flying, though well-stuffed birds are generally placed in typical attitudes. Also visit the shops of bird-catchers and bird-dealers *at different seasons* ; here many of the commoner ones, at all events, may be seen.

Further : make out a list *for yourself* of the birds and all their various characteristics, and all connected with them—*this will teach you very much*. Do not be discouraged if you do not know birds at once, *remembering that only practice can make you learn them thoroughly*. One last word—If you are a collector don't mercilessly rob birds' nests—take only one, or at most two, eggs, and don't disturb the nests more than you can help, and *use all means in your power to protect our little feathered friends in every way*. If you are a sportsman, refrain from shooting any but game birds, which may be utilized as food. If you find the nest of a rare bird, tell only your bosom friend about it.

EGGS OF THE BIRDS DESCRIBED



PLATE XXXIV (NATURAL SIZES).

GREENFINCH

White with pale purplish red spots at larger end

LINNET

Chalky white or tinged blue, spotted light reddish-brown and purplish-red—Spots sometimes very few or none

YELLOWHAMMER

Purplish-white, streaked and veined reddish, purple and violet grey

RED-BACKED SHRIKE

Pale green, pale buff, pale salmon, or cream, spotted and blotched reddish-brown and purplish-grey

SKYLARK

Greyish-white, spotted and clouded dark greenish-brown

PIED WAGTAIL

Pale bluish spotted greyish brown

JAY

Pale greyish-green, speckled and spotted pale olive-brown

MAGPIE

Pale bluish-green, freckled olive-brown and faintly blotched ash

MISSIL THRUSH

Ground colour variable, from bluish-white to reddish-brown, variously spotted and blotched with purple, brown, and grey

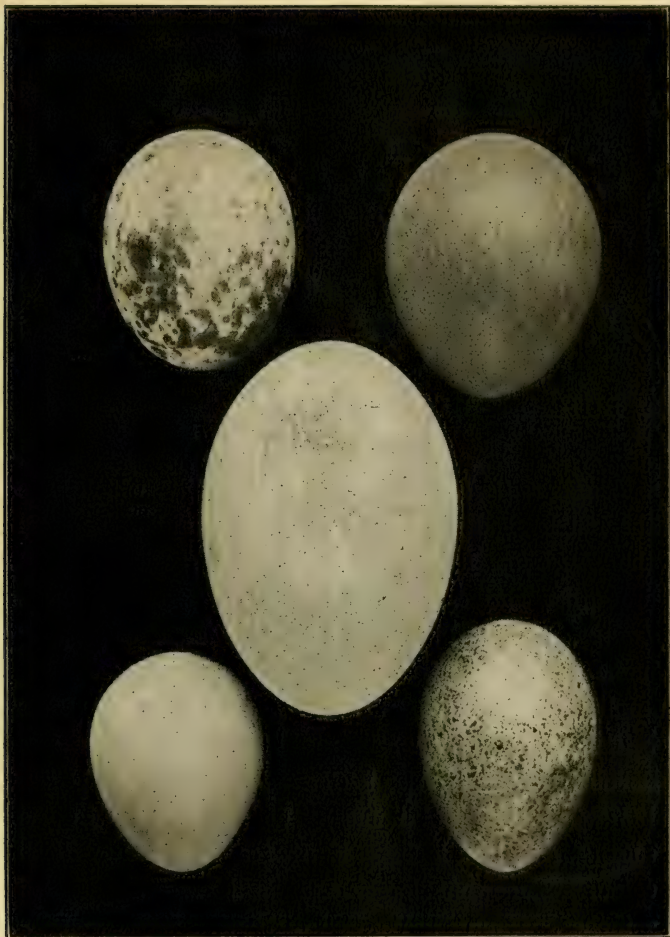


PLATE XXXV (NATURAL SIZES).

KESTREL

Reddish-white, blotched, dull red all over

PHEASANT

Uniform olive-brown with minute dots all over

HERON

Pale dull (sea) green

ENGLISH PARTRIDGE

Pale greenish-brown yellow

FRENCH (RED-LEGGED) PARTRIDGE

Reddish yellowish-white, spotted and speckled all over with brownish-red

SYNOPSIS AND ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF SOME OF THE BIRDS MENTIONED

1. BUTCHER-BIRD, OR RED-BACKED SHRIKE

(Pages 110-112)

Lanius collurio, one of the shrike family, which have the bill hooked more or less. *Shrike* said to be from the *shriek-like* notes of some of the species. (There are other shrikes, rare stragglers in Great Britain.) *Lanius*, Lat., a butcher. *Collurio*, Lat., an old book name for a kind of thrush (? fieldfare) and afterwards applied to the shrike. **Syn.** : *Nine Killer*, the bird was believed by country folk to kill nine victims before devouring them ! Also : *Cheeter*, *Flesher*, *Jack Baker*. *Whisky John* (local names). **Found** : Chiefly in the south. A robust-looking bird of a grey and reddish colour. Somewhat larger than a sparrow. **Length** : 7 inches. **Haunts** : Wooded districts, quarries, chalk-pits, etc. **Habits** : Sits on rather high prominent perches from which it darts at insects, etc., and returns to same perch (like the flycatcher, *see* Part II, p. 175), and turns its head from side to side, and jerks its tail.

Devours at once or stores up insects and small birds by impaling them on thorns, plucking the birds before eating them (*butcher-bird*). **Notes** : Call note, a low sharp chirp often repeated. **Migratory** : Arrives April, departs in September or October. **Plumage** : *Male*, Quaker-grey on head and upper part of back, lower back and wings chestnut brown (*red-backed shrike*), under parts rose-buff. (*Female* : rusty brown on upper part of body, greyish-white beneath without the grey patch on back.) **Tail** : Rounded at end, upper part white. **Bill** : Upper mandible hooked at the end ; bristles at base of beak (as in other flesh-eating birds, e.g. carrion crow). **Food** : Large insects, mice, frogs, etc., and small birds. **Nest** : Resembles blackbird's, but larger, substantial ; in May or June, in a bush or hedge generally, rather high ; open, cup-shaped. *Made of* : Dried grass, twigs, roots, moss, etc., *lined with* fine roots, and stalks. **Second nests** : Only one yearly. **Eggs** : Pale reddish-white, spotted red-brown of different shades. Five or six.

2. CHIFFCHAFF

(Pages 139-143)

Phylloscopus rufus, or *Sylvia rufa* (*Phylloscopus* and *Sylvia*. See willow-wren or warbler, and nightingale. Lat., *Sylva*, a wood ; *Rufus*, Lat., red). Chiffchaff from

its notes. **Found** : Generally distributed, but most in south. **Haunts** : Wooded districts, keeps to certain localities, comes to gardens often in autumn. A gentle-looking, sober-coloured bird. Smaller than a sparrow. **Length** : $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Resembles somewhat the willow-wren, but is smaller (*see* Part II, pp. 164-7), of only two shades of colour, viz. : upper parts olive green, tinged yellow ; under parts yellowish-white, a faint white streak above eye. **Male and female** : Indistinguishable. **Habits** : Always moving about (something like the tits) in seach of insects, etc., often takes insects in the air. Defends itself and nest vigorously. **Flight** : Mostly from tree to tree. **Food** : Insects, flies, moths, caterpillars, etc. **Notes** : ' Chiffchaff, chiffchaff, chiffchaff ' (whence name) three or four times, and often repeated, loud and insistent ; heard as soon as it arrives (middle of March), sings all the summer, but less in late summer. Also ' whoo-id ' if alarmed. **Migratory** : Arrives middle of March or even earlier (the first of the *warblers* to arrive), and leaves in October. **Nest** : In May, domed, or rather half-roofed over, with grass, etc., with an opening at one side ; *Situated* : On the ground in tall grass, or in a hedge-bank, or in a very low bush, or old tree stump. *Made of* : Dry grass, leaves, moss, etc., lined with many feathers, wool, hair, etc. **Second nests** : Probably. **Eggs** : Pure white, spotted and specked brown and purplish, rounded at one end, pointed at the other. Six or seven.

3. GREENFINCH

(Pages 153-6)

Ligurinus chloris. *Ligurinus*, Lat., pertaining to the district of Liguria where, I suppose, the birds are found. Gr., *chloros*, green. **Syn.** : *Green-chub*, *green linnet* (but quite distinct from the linnet). **Size and general description** : About the same size as a sparrow, rather heavy in appearance. **Length** : 6 inches. Of sober **plumage** : Olive green, variegated with yellow (the yellow is bright in full sunlight) and also grey (the grey predominating). **Male and female** : Much alike, but the female lacks the bright yellow, and has a leaden hue. **Found** : Generally distributed, common. **Habits and nature** : Comes about gardens and houses more than the other finches, but hides much in greenery. Sociable, not vindictive. Go about in small flocks even in breeding season, and in autumn and winter in *large* flocks often with other flocks of chaffinches, linnets, sparrows, etc. Easily caught in nets. **Flight** : Strong, straight, wings moved rapidly. **Notes** : At times soft warbling notes. Also a long drawn out plaintive 'tway' if alarmed. Also other notes, some rich, some harsh. **Food** : Seeds (especially dandelion, groundsel, chickweed, etc.), hips and haws, etc., in winter. **Migration** : Some migrate, but large numbers remain throughout the year. **Nests** : In April or May. Rather loose. Round, open, cup-shaped. *Situated* : In bushes

(including evergreens), low trees, or high hedges. *Made of*: Straw, roots, moss, wool, etc., and lined with hair and feathers. **Second nests**: Three or four nests each year. **Eggs**: White, faintly speckled purplish-red at larger end. Five or six (or even seven).

4. HERON

(Pages 19-46)

Ardea cinerea. *Ardea*, Lat., a heron; Gr., *erodios*; Fr., *héron*; Lat., *cinereus*, pertaining to ashes (from the general grey colour of the birds). Wading birds allied to the cranes, storks, etc. **General description, size, and plumage**: A tall, long-legged (wading) and long-beaked bird. **Length**: 36 inches. **Bill**: 6 inches. Of a general slate-grey colour. **Crest**: Black (no crest till third year). **Under parts**: Greyish-white. **Chief wing feathers**: Black. **Wings**: Rounded at ends. **Neck**: White, a few long dark slate feathers (plume) hanging down in front (not acquired till the third year). **Legs and toes**: Greenish-yellow. **Bill**: Yellow. Has a slow measured **flight** (weight of adult bird, only 3 lbs.; wings more than 4 feet across) with legs stretched out straight behind. Soars sometimes to a great height. Alights with difficulty on trees or nests. **Male and female**: Much alike (plume shorter in female and markings not so distinct nor so bright). **Eye**: Bold and piercing.

Found : Widely distributed but local. Heronries few now. **Habits :** Store food (fishes, frogs, etc.) in the gullet to take to the young. **Nest** in communities (heronries) like rooks, the birds returning to the same heronries year after year. **Feed** (often at night) in marshes and shallow waters, standing motionless for long periods watching for fish, etc. Very voracious. **Note :** A loud and harsh 'quawck' (something like peacock, but clangy). **Food :** Fish (old and fry), frogs, toads, snakes, slugs, worms, mice, etc. (sometimes rats). Sometimes well-fed, sometimes starving. **Not migratory.** **Nests** in March. **Situated :** High in the tops of large trees (firs and oaks favourites) in sheltered woods, often over or near water or morass, on high cliffs, if near the sea. Various sizes but mostly about 3 feet across, and 1 foot high, loosely constructed, careless (like pigeons) of disordered appearance, flat on the top. Same nest may be reconstructed year after year, and so gets larger. **Made of :** Sticks chiefly, lined with some wool, rushes, etc., **Second nests :** Two broods yearly. **Eggs :** Pale dull sea-green. Four or five.

5. JAY

(Pages 93-6)

Garrulus (and *corvus*) *glandarius*. Lat., *garrulus*, chattering, etc. *Glans*, *glandis* in Lat., means an acorn, and may refer to the bird's love for acorns. *Jay* of

same origin as word *gay*, viz., Fr., *gai*, also *jai*; Old Spanish, *gayo*, from both its plumage as well as its manners. **General description, size, and plumage:** The harsh chattering of this bird (whence Latin name) as you approach, attracts attention (it has other alarm notes and also call notes, and is said to be a mimic) but it requires finding as it hides itself much, having been relentlessly hunted by gamekeepers for generations, on account of its nest pilfering. **Length:** 13½ inches, in size between a blackbird and a small pigeon. It frequents wooded districts. **Found:** Generally distributed. The blue (of peculiar shade) on wings distinctive. **Flight:** Heavy, straight. **General plumage:** Reddish-brown; upper parts of wings, bright blue. **Tail:** Rather long, and it shows *much white on lower part of the back* in flight. Has a greyish-white, black-streaked crest which is often elevated, also moustache-like black feathers at sides of beak. **Habits:** Restless, wings often half expanded and tail moved much. **Food:** Almost anything edible, including eggs of other birds, small birds and mice (but not carrion), and sometimes conceals food not eaten at once. **Not migratory.** **Nest:** In April or May, open-cup-shaped, *resembles a blackbird's, but is twice the size.* **Made of:** Twigs and sticks, with mud, and *lined with fine roots.* **Situated:** Not very high in bushes (including evergreens) and low in trees, well concealed. **Second nests:** Not. **Eggs:** Ground colour yellowish-white, which is hidden by very many close

greenish-brown spots, and black streaks at larger end. Five or six.

6. LINNET

(Pages 84-90)

Linota cannabina. Fr., *Linot*, a linnet, from the Lat. root *linum*, flax, also Gr., *cannabis*, hemp ; these two words duplicating the name and referring to the food of the birds. One of the finch tribe. **General description, size and plumage** : A lively little bird, rather smaller than a sparrow. **Length** : $5\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 inches. Looks brown and black on upper parts, lighter beneath. Seen close the tips of the wings and tail are black, edged with white. The wild **male** bird has a crimson crown, forehead and breast. (This crimson is lost in captivity.) The colours are lighter in the **female** and she has no crimson. They are constantly chirping one to the other, either flying or when sitting as they often do on bush tops. ¹ They are favourite cage birds and large numbers of males are captured for their song, which is beautiful and varied. **Found** : Widely distributed, chiefly on waste lands where weeds abound, from which they get their seed **food**. Also much amongst furze. **Habits** : Sociable. Go about in small companies even at nesting time, but assemble in large flocks in autumn

¹ *Distinguish* the Twite, much like it, but has a *yellow beak*.

and winter, and associate then with flocks of chaffinches, greenfinches, bramblings, and wander about over large tracts of land; when disturbed the flocks do not take cover like greenfinches. **Flight**: Rapid and straight. Have a habit of suddenly alighting on a bush or tree-top. **Notes**: Varied, described on p. 88. The call note has been spelt, 'chuck-a-chuck, a.' Notes often uttered on the wing. The male sings to the sitting female. **Plumage**: See above. The tints are very varied. The birds are met with brown, cream, to cinnamon and sometimes even pied. One yellow variety is known as the 'lemon linnet,' and another as the 'brown linnet.' Many **migrate** in October returning in March, but large numbers remain all the year. **Nest**: In March to April. Open, cup-shaped. *Situated*: Very often low in furze, but also in dense may and other bushes, and then difficult to get at. *Made of*: Light twigs, stalks and grass, moss and wool, *lined with* horsehair and down. **Second Nests**: Two or three broods each year. **Eggs**: Chalk-white tinged blue, spotted with small reddish-brown and purplish spots, shades variable. *Sometimes no spots*. Four or five or six.

7. MAGPIE

(Pages 97-102)

Pica rustica (also *caudata* from its long tail; Lat. *cauda*, a tail). Also *corvus pica*, Lat., *corvus* a crow.

Mag, the short for Margaret, in Magpie, is a pet name like *Robin* redbreast, and *Jenny* wren. *Pie* from the Lat. *pica*, a magpie; *rustica* pertaining to the country (Lat. *rus*, *ruris*, the country). **General description, size and plumage** : A black and white bird with a long tail (the black all over the bird is lustrous blue and green). **Tail** : All black. About the size of a pigeon, but the long tail, which is more than half its entire length, makes the bird measure 18 inches. **Found** : Generally distributed, in woods, fond of one locality. **Notes** : A quick 'chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat.' Chatters much at the sight of a stoat, fox or cat. **Habits and nature** : Cunning, wary, sagacious, excitable, inquisitive and pilfering (fond of stealing and hiding bright objects, as silver spoons and forks, etc.), *restless*. Can be taught to imitate words in captivity, easily tamed. **Flight** : Low, slow and interrupted (from tree to tree or along hedges) with a sudden quick movement of wings at intervals. **Wings** : Short, showing much white on flight. **Male and female** : Much alike. *Pair for life*. **Food** : Taken on the ground, where he hops and runs and elevates tail, and dashes about from side to side, *almost anything edible* (including carrion) insects, grubs, snails, worms, etc. Also pilfers other nests of their eggs, and will kill and eat other young birds (including game and chickens) also young hares and rabbits. (Small birds very excited at approach of magpies.) **Not migratory**. **Nest** : In April, 2 or 3 feet high and 1 foot or more broad. Open,

cup-shaped (inside) lined with mud, grasses and fibres. Over this is a roof of strong thorny sticks and mud, with a hole for entrance, just large enough for the bird. *Situated* : Generally high in trees, or hedges, but sometimes (rarely) low. Generally inaccessible from its elevation, or in very thick-set branches. **Second nests** : Probably not. **Eggs** : Pale dull bluish-white, spotted ash grey and greenish-brown. Six or seven.

8. MISSEL THRUSH

(Pages 160-5)

Turdus viscivorus. Lat., *turdus*, a thrush. *Viscum*, the mistletoe, and *voro*, I eat. The birds are fond of all sorts of berries. It was once thought that the berries of the mistletoe would not germinate unless the bird had swallowed and voided them ! **Syn.** : Storm-thrush, storm-cock, as the male loves to sing in stormy and wet weather, even in the winter (singing most from mid-winter to nesting-time, but not during the breeding season) perched on some high branch swaying in the wind. **General description, size and plumage** : A bird much like the common song thrush in shape and plumage, but larger, **length**, 11 inches (song thrush, 9 inches). It is the largest of our thrushes, and with the black spots on the breast larger and more distinct. It will generally be found near some berry-bearing bushes or trees when the berries are ripe. At other times

(except at nesting-time) feeding in a meadow or field, with a few others and sometimes in large flocks. They feed like the song thrushes moving along the ground and stopping every now and then, but *assume a very statuesque appearance*. A flock on alighting scatters widely. They are then wary, one bird often giving the note of alarm to the whole flock. The **flight** is louping. Its **jarring note** will attract you. The **ordinary song** is not very melodious. **Found** : Generally distributed, but rare or absent in the north of Scotland. **Haunts** : Wooded districts, orchards and gardens. **Male and female** : Alike, but the female is paler. **Nature** : Bold and pugnacious, especially at nesting-time ; the jarring note is often uttered when quarrelling. **Habits** : See above. Assemble in flocks (large or small) from June onwards to midwinter. **Food** : Besides berries (their favourite food), fruit, insects, worms, grubs, etc. **Not migratory**. **Flesh** : Edible. **Nest** : Very early in spring, at beginning of March. Open, cup-shaped. **Size** : large (about 4 inches across inside) and *deep* (eggs invisible unless seen from above), substantial. **Situated** : Rarely in evergreens, generally in an oak, elm, or beech, or in an apple or pear tree in an orchard, and mostly in the thick forks of the main stem, and not high (rarely at tops of trees). *Not concealed*. *Made of* : Moss, and dried grass, and often bits of cloth, etc., with mud ; *lined with* fine grasses. (Not lined with mud as song thrush's). **Second nests** : Two or

three broods yearly. **Eggs** : Ground colour, bluish-white to pale reddish-brown. Various marked with brown and purple to grey. Four or five.

9. SKYLARK

(Page 58-62)

Alauda arvensis. *Alauda*, a Celtic word meaning literally a great (*al*, high, great) songstress. *Arvensis* : Lat., *arvum*, a cultivated field. *Lark*, Anglo-Saxon lawerc, Danish loerke, German lerche. **General description, size and plumage** : A sandy and darker brown coloured bird bigger than a sparrow ; **length**, $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Under parts, yellowish-brown, elongated dark brown spots on throat and neck, white streak over eye. Varieties occur. **Male and female** : Alike in colour, female slightly the smaller. **Found** : Widely distributed. **Haunts** : Open places, pastures and cultivated fields, etc. **Habits** : Assemble in flocks from September through the winter. Keep to the ground, on which they run nimbly in search of food (rarely perch). Like dust-baths. **Flight** : Undulating (louping). **Notes** : Song continuous and varied, often sustained for half an hour, cannot be spelt. Uttered on the wing when mounting higher and higher (soaring) to a great height in a circular manner, descending gradually in the same way, alighting suddenly when a few feet from the ground,

the song then ceasing abruptly. Sings most at nesting-time, continuing through the summer, but also in winter if the weather be fine. **Food** : Seeds and insects. **Flesh** : Edible. Large numbers are sold in markets, both English and continental birds. **Migration** : Many migrate, but many remain all the year. Large numbers arrive from the Continent in autumn. **Nest** : April. *shape* : Shallow, without a definite cup. *Situated* : On the ground, in a slight hollow in any open place, but mostly in tall grass. *Made of* : Dried grass chiefly, and fine roots. **Second nests** : Two or three broods each year. **Eggs** : Greyish-white, tinged green, mottled dark grey and brown—shades variable. Five.

10. WAGTAILS

(Pages 128-134)

Motacilla melanope, **Grey Wagtail**; *Motacilla lugubris*, **Pied Wagtail**; *Motacilla rayii*, **Yellow Wagtail**. *Motacilla*, Lat., a wagtail, from Lat. *moreo*, *motum*, to move. *Cilla* is a diminutive meaning little literally, from the constant little (quick) wags (up and down) of the tails. *Melanope*, Gr., *melas*, black; and *opsis*, appearance. *Lugubris*, Lat., *lugeo*, I weep, hence *lugubris*, of a mournful appearance, referring to the plumage (not the look of the bird). *Rayii*, after Ray, a distinguished naturalist. **General description** :

These birds have been described and differentiated and their **haunts** and **notes** given on pp. 131-4. **Lengths** : *Grey* and *Pied Wagtails*, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches ; *Yellow Wagtail* (the smallest), 6 inches. **Flight** : Louping (undulating), movements very graceful. **Food** : Insects chiefly. **Habits** : Keep wagging the tail up and down constantly. Run quickly on the ground. Often on the ground, but perch also. The *Pied* is the one fondest of water (*Water Wagtail*). **Found** : Generally distributed. The *pied* and the *yellow* are the commonest. Partial to the same locality. **Migration** : The *Yellow Wagtail* is a pure migrant leaving in autumn and arriving March to April. Of the others, the *Pied Wagtail* goes south in the autumn, some going to the Continent ; the *Grey Wagtail* goes north in the autumn, returning in spring. **Male and female** : Much alike. **Nests** : In March to April. Open, cup, shallow. *Situated* : Generally on the ground, or in a bank and in grass, but sometimes in odd places. *Made of* : Grass chiefly, and fine roots and twigs, and lined with hair, feathers and wool. **Second nests** : Probably two broods each year. **Eggs** : *Yellow Wagtail* : White ground, mottled pale olive brown ; *Pied Wagtail* : Pale bluish, spotted greyish-brown ; *Grey Wagtail* : White or grey, mottled and spotted brown and olive. All five or six.

II. YELLOW-HAMMER OR YELLOW BUNTING

(Pages 166-8)

Emberiza citrinella. *Emberiza*, low Lat., a bunting, from a similar German word for bunting. *Citrus*, Lat., the lemon, or citron. Origin of Bunting unknown. *Yellow-hammer*, really *Yellow-ammer* from old Saxon *amore*, a bird. **Syn.** : Goldie, etc. **Found** : Widely distributed. **Frequents** : Waste lands and commons. **General description, size and plumage** : A heavy-looking bird, rather larger than a sparrow, **length** $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches, of a reddish-brown and bright yellow colour; **upper parts** reddish-brown with dusky spots; **head, neck, breast and under parts** bright yellow; depth of shades vary; shows the white of its tail feathers in flight. **Habits** : Very fond of perching on the top of a high bush. Sedentary, often remains motionless on its high perch, uttering its notes. Assemble in flocks in the autumn and winter associating with chaffinches, greenfinches, and the common buntings. Flocks take to tops of trees if disturbed. May roost on the ground in summer. **Flight** : Louping, strong and rapid. Tail (which is dull black with outside white feathers) often displayed in flight. **Notes** : Monotonous, often uttered, spelt, 'chit-chit—chirr-r-r,' said by country-folk to resemble, 'Bit of bread and no cheese.' The long drawn out 'cheese' is very characteristic, uttered perched. **Food** : Seeds in winter, insects

in summer. **Female** : Colours duller and less white in tail. **Not migratory**, but move about much. **Nest** : April, in bushes, furze, etc., or lower in a bank or hedge amongst grass. Large and solid. *Made of* : Roots, stalks, grass and moss, lined with horsehair and fibres. **Second Nests** : Probably. **Eggs** : Ground colour purplish-white, variously marked, deep reddish-purple and violet. Shades variable. Four or five.

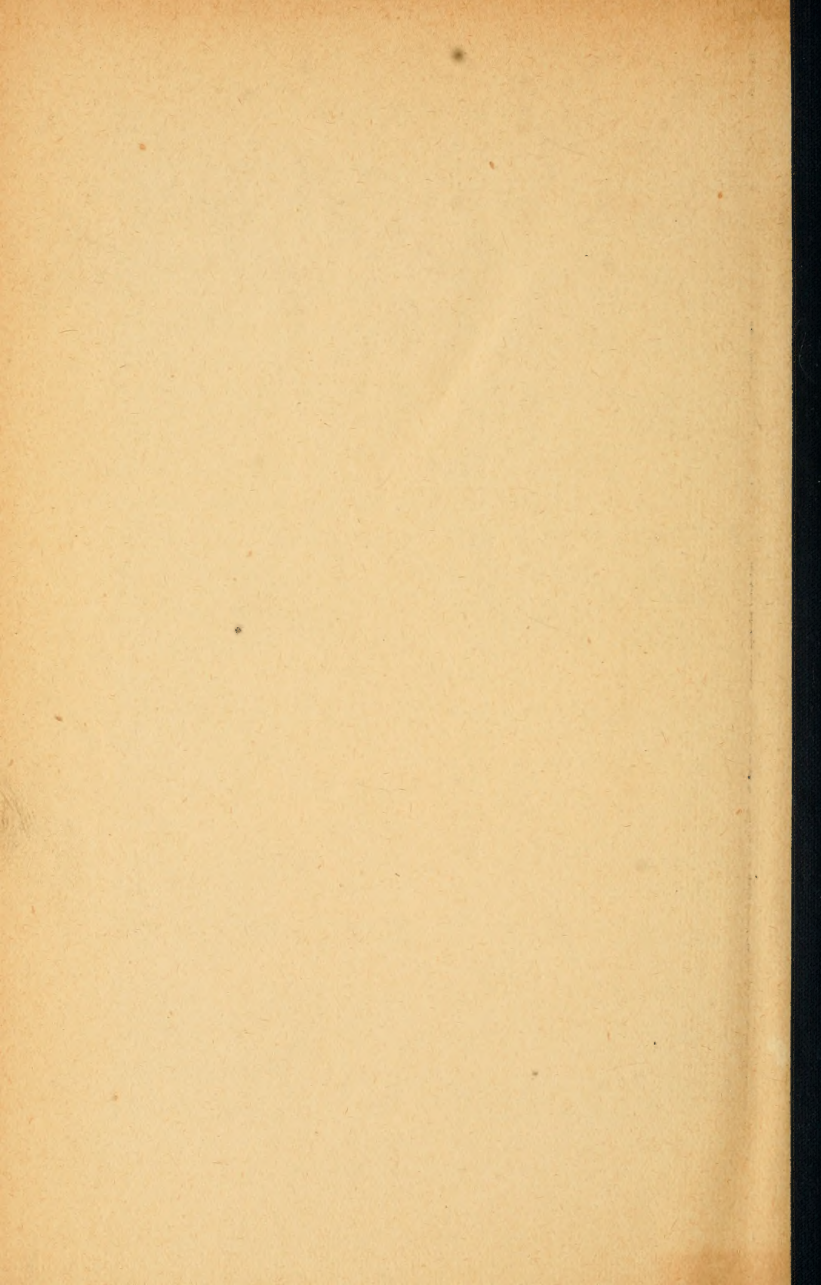
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Syn. refers to the Synopsis of the bird.

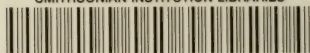
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